







F E R R E R S.

VOL. II.

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F E R R E R S.

A ROMANCE OF THE

REIGN OF GEORGE THE SECOND.

BY CHARLES OLLIER.

THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS, YET THERE'S METHOD IN IT.—SHAKSPEARE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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F E R R E R S.

BOOK THE SECOND, CONTINUED.

1756—1759.

The Marriage and Divorce.

VOL. II.

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FERRERS.

BOOK THE SECOND,

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL SITUATION—THE HAG OF AVON STREET—HER STRANGE INTERROGATIONS—A SURPRISE—"THE WORD OF PROMISE TO THE EAR, BROKEN TO THE HOPE"—A SCUFFLE, AND TIMELY MANOEUVRE—ALL FAIR IN WAR—THE ESCAPE—HUGH'S RETURN HOME.

That but thou doe as I shall thee devise,
Thou shalt be ded!

CHAUCER.

FOR more than an hour Hugh Bernard remained alone in a state of shuddering anxiety. Could he have freed his arms from the rope that bound them, some chance of life would still have remained ; for though his figure was slight, he was bold of heart, young, strong

and active ; and would have contended manfully against both the heavy ruffians.

But his efforts to unbind himself were vain. Death seemed inevitable ! It was hard to perish by murderous hands, so young and while life seemed just opening upon him with fair prospects. Still, he never repented the attempt he had made to bring Gabel to justice ; no, not even when the distracting thought arose of leaving Sarah Johnson.

While thus awaiting his doom, the moon had declined low in the west and darkness had set in. After a time, Bernard heard a door below open, and somebody walk towards the stairs : once again, the tread of feet were heard ascending, but they were not so heavy as before. In a moment, a light flashed through the keyhole, followed by the drawing aside of the outer bolts, when, opening the door slowly, an old woman entered, and, placing her candle upon a chair, fastened the bolt on the inside, and looked inquisitively at the captive.

She was a little creature, neatly dressed,

though in garments of the poorest kind. Her apron, and the kerchief pinned over her long waist, were as white and clean as new-fallen snow, and her grey hair, drawn backwards from the roots, was partly covered by the ponderous cap and deep frills or lappets falling over the ears in the manner prevalent among the lower class of women at that period. The sleeves of her stuff gown did not reach below the elbow, but disclosed one half of an arm singularly large, rugged and muscular for one, who, in other respects was so meagre and small.

Hugh looked anxiously into the face of his visiter. In its pale and shrivelled lineaments, was an expression of caution amounting to cunning. Her eyes, being dim and watery, were without expression ; but Bernard thought there was something remorseless in her frowning brow, and tightly compressed lips.

Still, what had he to fear from an aged and diminutive woman ? Her coming to him instead of the men, was calculated to inspire

hope rather than despair. The purport of her visit was, however, a mystery, as she remained in the room many minutes without speaking, being occupied in walking restlessly about, and in scanning the young man's features.

At length she broke the silence by desiring Bernard to be seated.

"Thee cans't zit, I s'pose, though thee arms be fastened," she said.

Hugh nodded an assent.

"Why dusn't zpeak, mun, 'eh?" resumed the crone. "To be zhure, a nod be as good as a wink to a blind horse; but then I bay'nt blind, nor deaf, nor a horse neither; but a Christian. So zpeak I tell'ee. Lard, lard!" she continued, "if I hadn't forgot that they've bin and gagged thee for fear thou shouldst gi' the alarm. I must set thee tongue vree, or my coming won't be o' no use; though mind, afore I unloose un, thee'd better take notice that if thee offer'st to cry out, I shall give'ee a mortal stab with this here." And she drew a knife from underneath her kerchief. "Zo

thee zees there bayn't no use in bawling no how."

So saying, she removed the impediment from Bernard's mouth, and for a brief space stood over her captive brandishing the formidable weapon to ensure his silence.

"What is the nature of your errand?" said he in a low tone. "Why am I kept here, bound and a prisoner?"

"I bayn't come up stairs to answer no questions," was the response.

"What is your purpose then?" demanded Hugh.

"To ax *thee* a few," replied the old woman.

"What can you possibly have to ask me?" said Bernard, rising from his seat in amazement.

"Zit down, I tell'ee, and keep theeself quiet," muttered the crone. "Thee bisn't afeard of a old hooman bee's't? Do the look o' the knife, fluster thee a bit! Lard love 'ee! that shan't be no denial to 'ee. Zee! I'll pitch un to thick furder carner." And she cast the

weapon away to the most distant part of the room. “Take a little breathing time, my boy,” she continued, “and then prepare thee-self to answer my questions.”

“Will you unbind me first?” enquired Bernard. “This hard rope cuts into my arms.”

“Unbind thee!” echoed the hag. “Why ‘tis more nor my life be worth to do that.”

“Who sent you to me?” said Bernard.

“I tell ‘ee I won’t anzur no questions,” replied the old woman.

Hugh perceived plainly enough that his strange companion was not to be thrown off her guard; and he looked anxiously about him, now that the room was lighted, to see if there was any chance of escape by a sudden forcible manœuvre. Though his arms were still strictly bound, his voice was no longer obstructed. Might he not by a rapid push with his shoulder, dash out one or two of the patched window panes, and shout through them for help? Or could he not trip up the old woman’s chair, as she sat between him and the door, and then

drawing back the bolt with his teeth, rush down stairs, and so endeavour to regain the street ?

The latter of these projects seemed to be the most feasible ; for as the door hung loosely on its hinges and did not touch the frame-work, the bolt could the more readily be withdrawn. Every thing, indeed, in the room looked old, feeble and ruinous. The wooden quarterings of which the partitions were formed, had never been covered, and the wretched plastering in their interstices had peeled off in many places, revealing the bare laths, like the bones of a gaunt skeleton. A similar miserable aspect, was presented by the ceiling, upheld by slight transverse beams, blackened with smoke, and rotten with damp. It was a squalid scene, bespeaking utter poverty in its bare wretchedness, sloth in the dirt that defiled it, intemperance in a certain faint, stale and loathsome smell of tobacco, beer and gin, and guilt and violence in the barred windows.

While Hugh Bernard meditated on his alight chances for escape, the old woman's eyes were fixed with a scrutinizing gaze on his countenance, and it was evident that she penetrated into the depths of his mind ; for, deliberately rising, she walked to the corner of the room where she had thrown her knife, and, picking up the weapon, replaced it under her kerchief.

" Now," said she, " I tell'ee what thee bees't a thinking on—escape. But t'an't o' no use. Lard love 'ee ! dost think Jack Dust be azleep ? P'raps he's listening at the door now, and thee dosn't know what zort of people they be in the court."

" Who is Jack Dust?" inquired Bernard.

" My zon," replied the old woman, averting her face, and as Hugh thought, endeavouring to stifle a sigh.

" What can he have to do with me ?" asked Hugh.

" Don't 'ee—don't 'ee put no more questions to me, that's a good lad," responded the old

woman in a hurried tone. "Besides I han't got no time to zpare, and it be getting martial late. Now hark to me. Thees't a' bin this evening up along to Claverton."

"Well, what then?"

"Why a couple o' chaps overtook thee."

"What of that?"

"Dids't know 'em?"

Hugh paused for a moment. It might be that his life hung on his answer. He resolved to dissemble, and replied in the negative.

"I don't mean *both* on 'em," said the hag; "the good Lard forefend that! but *one* on 'em thee zhurely hast seen afore. Tell the truth, that's a good lad."

"I don't recollect to have done so," answered Hugh evasively.

"That's martial odd," muttered the old woman; "'cause nobody couldn't see Jem, without knowing of him again. Dids't thee never live in Lunnun?"

"No."

"What, not in a place out in the fields nigh to a village they call Hamztead?"

Hugh was amazed at this close scrutiny. He had already felt abased by his first falsehood, and he resolved, come what may, to utter no more untruths.

"I *did* once live in such a place," said he.

"I thought so," replied the old woman.
"What made thee leave it?"

Hugh shuddered at the question. To recall to his memory the doleful night that drove him from the cottage at West End, would, at any time, have been tormenting; but in such a place as that wherein he was now confined, and under the dread of impending violence, the recollection was unutterably fearful.

The crone perceived Bernard's hesitation and dismay. "Anzur me," she said imperatively.

"Torturer!" exclaimed Hugh. "Why do you rack me with such enquiries? Leave me."

"Leave thee!" echoed the old woman, tre-

mulously. "What then? I don't ought to do it. No, no! I won't leave thee yet. Poor young man!"

Hugh caught at her tone of sympathy as a dying man would clutch a straw.

"You pity me!" he exclaimed. "If you have ever been in danger yourself—if you have known the transport of being succoured in your utmost need, or the still greater joy of delivering those who are in peril, help me—help me! On my soul, I have done no wrong."

"Alack, alack!" ejaculated the old woman.
"What can I do?"

"Unbind me," answered Bernard with breathless emotion.

"And lose my own life?" responded the crone. "Mayhap I shouldn't much mind that, for I am very old, and I think I couldn't go to a worser place than this be. But *my* blood wouldn't make *thee* none the safer."

"You see me here in peril," rejoined Bernard. "The extent of my danger is better known to you than to me. But be it much or

little, I would not avoid it by putting your life in jeopardy."

At this moment, an indistinct muttering was heard outside the door.

"That's Jem!" whispered the old woman in alarm. "I know his tongue even when nobody else can't hardly hear him. He's on the prying lay, and I must finish my job."

Then elevating her voice, she repeated her former question. "What made thee leave the house near Lunnun?"

"I was forced to leave it."

"Why?"

"Because the Lady to whom it belonged—my guardian—died."

"Died! Why, wasn't she murdered?" said the old woman.

"She was!" replied Hugh, with a groan.

"And thee was in the house at the time?" said the crone enquiringly.

"Alas! yes."

"There was a young hooman there at the same time—a girl about thy own age, as slept

in the room where they took and murdered the lady. There was more nor one man concerned in that job, warn't there?"

"There were three men," replied Hugh Bernard.

"Well, well," returned the hag, with a sigh and averting her face. "Now this is my last question. I'm obligated to ax it, or I wouldn't. What has become of that young hooman, and where does she live now?"

"She is dead!" replied Bernard, bursting into tears.

"That'll do!" exclaimed the gruff voice outside the door, and the steps of the speaker were heard descending the stairs.

"I must leave thee now," said the old woman rising, "or they'll take and drag me away. Jem's gone down, and they're getting ready to do what curdles every drop o' my blood only to think on. My heart somehow yearns to thee, poor lad. I shall never zee thee again. Kiss me, if thou canst kiss a creature zo wicked, and old, and ugly as I be."

Hugh pressed his lips to the aged woman's face, and ejaculated "God bless you!"

"Thy name?" demanded she in panting accents.

"Bernard—Hugh Bernard."

"And the young hooman's?"

"Judith—my twin sister!"

The old woman stood for a time gazing with a wild look into Bernard's eyes. She shook in every limb; then staggering backwards, sank into her chair; her head dropped, and her breast heaved convulsively.

Hugh was now more bewildered than ever. He feared the poor creature had fallen into a fit, and did his best, desperately situated as he was, to recover her. For a minute or so, his efforts were vain. At length the old woman lifted her head, and, with a solemn countenance, exclaimed:

"The finger of the Almighty be in this! God, God!" she continued, sobbing as if her heart would break, and throwing her arms

round Bernard's neck, "zomething told me, I knew thee from the very first. Dear boy ! I have nursed both thee and thy zister in times long agone. And *now*—O, misery ! misery!"

"Nursed us !" echoed Bernard in amazement.

"Ay ! Thy father has zeen thee and Judith at my breast many's the time."

"My father ! Who is my father ?" demanded Bernard gaspingly. "For the love of Heaven tell me ! And are you," he added as a sickening tremor came over him, "are *you* my—mother ?"

"Me ! No, no, to be zure. Thy mother is—"

"Why do you pause ? Speak !"

"There bayn't no time. There be them below as wait for thy blood ! Thee'st a' bin decoyed here to be zlaughtered lest thee shoulds't be witness agen Jem Gabel, and —. 'Twou'd a' bin done afore now, only they wanted me to find out where the young hooman was that

they might way-lay her in the same regard. And zo poor Judith be dead! Quick! Let me zet thy arms vree. Vight for thy life agen Jem Gabel—thee hast no other chance. I'll keep back Jack, if I can. The odds be agen thee; but the battle bayn't always to the strong."

"What then will become of you, when they find you have unbound me?"

"Never mind me. All I beg of thee, should'st thee get vree, is never to put my zon—Jack Dust—in danger o' the law. There—thy arms be loosened. They'll be here anon. Give me the rope. Take thee this crow-bar," she added removing a short bar of iron which stood against one of the wooden quarterings. "Pluck up a ztout heart. Devend thyself agen Jem Gabel. Hush! They come."

There was a rush along the passage. With the rapidity of lightning, the old woman drew back the bolt, and pulled the door wide open. The men were seen mounting the stairs.

"Jem's vust," ejaculated she. "Throw thyself at un while he's on the zteps. I'll vollow and help thee."

Profiting by the suggestion thus given, Hugh sprang headlong against the ruffians, who, unprepared for this sudden manœuvre, and having an insecure footing on the narrow steps, stumbled under the weight and impetuosity of his descent. Both the men fell, and Bernard, bounding over them, darted to the outer door.

But alas, this was locked ! and freedom, apparently so close at hand, mocked his hope. Gabel was soon upon his legs. The other fellow, having tumbled undermost, did not so quickly recover from the stunning effects of his fall. With Gabel, then, Hugh was now to struggle.

Planting his back against the door, Bernard confronted his bony adversary ; and, firmly grasping the crow-bar, awaited the attack. The ruffian saw the weapon, and paused. Then drawing a pistol, and holding it point-blank

at Hugh, he exclaimed, "Surrender this instant, or you are a dead man!"

"Never!" replied Bernard.

Gabel fired. Whether his hand had been rendered unsteady by his fall, or whether the sight of Bernard, armed and unbound, had confused him, we know not; but he missed his aim, and the young man, taking advantage of Gabel's momentary discomfiture, ran at him, dealt a heavy blow at his head with the short iron bar, and the ruffian rolled senselessly at his feet.

The report of the pistol roused Jack Dust from his insensibility. He was a younger and more active man than Gabel, and had he closed with Bernard so as to obstruct his use of the crow-bar, the latter must have been overpowered. The danger, however, from this quarter, had been foreseen by the old woman, who, while her son lay stunned, had drawn his wrists together, tied the rope she had taken from Bernard, tightly about them, and then making a coil with the other end

round the rough iron baluster at the foot of the stairs, confined him so that he could neither use his hands, nor move many inches from the spot.

"Who has done this?" bawled the ruffian. "Here—mother, cut this rope, and be d—d to 'ee."

Not heeding this tender and filial request, the old woman advanced towards Hugh, and finding that the key of the door was gone, instructed him to wrench off the lock with the crow-bar which had often been used in like manner on less justifiable occasions. One desperate tug, and the screws gave way. The door swung back on its hinges, and Hugh, drawing his preserver after him, darted into the court, and was soon in the open street.

"Not that way, as thee lov'st thee life," shouted the old woman. "We must keep clear of the quay, and get into Kingsmead Street, as quick as ever we can."

Following his conductress, Hugh soon reached the market-place, and the companions

stood under the protecting shadow of the Town-Hall.

"We must part now," said the old woman.
"Thee art zafe."

"But how can I provide for your security,
my kind deliverer?"

"It bayn't possible," she replied.

"You must go home with me," said Hugh.
"My employer, when I tell him all you have
done for me, will shelter you."

"And get my zon took up and hanged?
No, no."

"Where then will you go?"

"Home."

"They will murder you."

"Jem Gabel would, p'raps. But then he
didn't zee what I done. That blow o' thine
put un to sleep quiet enough. I bayn't much
aveard o' Jack, for the job was more on Jem's
account than Jack's; and when I tell my zon,
as how thee won't act agen' him, I don't think
he'll lift his hand upon his own mother. He
han't got the heart to zet his own blood a

vlowing out o' my poor old veins. If he do,
I don't much care. Don't try to stop me.
Good night, and Heaven bless thee!"

"But when can I see you again?"

"We may meet once more when 'tis less
dangerous mayhap than now. Every minute
I lingers, puts me in jeopardy."

"Farewell, then!" said Hugh. And having
told the old woman his address, and urged her
to call on him, that he might testify his grati-
tude, they parted.

A few steps brought Hugh to his home in
the Orange-Grove, where he found his master
sitting up for him in great alarm. Remember-
ing the promise he had given to the preserver
of his life, Bernard, in answer to Mr. Rowe's
anxious enquiries, merely said that he had
been in desperate peril, from which an un-
known friend had delivered him. He added
that, in requital of this great service, he had
pledged his word not to enter into a further
explanation, lest he might compromise his
deliverer.

Mr. Rowe knew too well the honesty and honour of Bernard to doubt his vague story, or to connect it with suspicions derogatory to his character. Having congratulated him on his escape, and counselled him to keep within doors for some time, Mr. Rowe retired. Hugh also sought his bed; but he could not sleep. His mind was busy with his late perilous adventure, and, above all, with the hint the old woman had dropped as to his parentage.

Resolving to seek her out, and obtain a further explanation, slumber stole on him with the coming of the drowsy dawn.

CHAPTER VI.

DEMONSTRATING THE POSSIBILITY THAT A PEER OF THE REALM MAY BE A BLACK-LEG—A JOCKEY'S HONOUR—HOW TO WIN A RACE—JEM IN THE PATHETICS—A STARTLING PROPOSAL—ARITHMETIC VERSUS ANGER.

The schemes of nefarious betters on “the Turf,” cannot be accomplished without minor sub-agents, such as jockies and trainers, with whom the farrier sometimes combines; so that sickness, bad condition, lameness, short wind, and death, can be ensured when necessary; not to mention bad starts and boltings.

THE TURF.

The events recorded in the last two chapters took place previously to the meeting of Lord Ferrers and Jem Gabel at Stanton Harold.

We left those worthy companions over the brandy-bottle after Lady Ferrers had retired from the dining-room, trembling and terror-stricken at the outrage offered by her lord.

Ferrers had desired Gabel to unmuffle his face that he might drink more comfortably—a request with which Jem seemed in no haste to comply.

“Take off your wrappings, man,” repeated his Lordship. “Not to compliment you, Jem, you certainly are the most ill-favoured fellow I ever saw, but I am by no means too handsome myself, and have no dread of catching that formidable disease, the Ugly, which I took naturally, and upon the whole rather favourably. So make yourself comfortable, my boy, and set your face free. I have told you nobody will come in till I ring.”

With a reluctance for which Lord Ferrers could not account, Gabel, unfolding the handkerchief which entirely concealed one side of his face, displayed, not only the old scar which seemed to extend his lips to his ear, but a large black patch over his temple.

“I never clearly understand your manœuvres, Jem,” said the Earl. “Is that great patch a recent improvement of the disguises

to which you are so much addicted, or have you met with a hurt?"

"I've had a bit of a blow, my Lord, that's all," said Gabel, sullenly; "so I was obligated to put on this here plaster."

"More for use than ornament, eh Jem?" returned the Earl. "You paid back the blow with compound interest, like a man, I'll be bound."

Jem did not seem to relish the subject and remained silent.

"Well, well," pursued Ferrers, "I shall not tease you about it. Drink, and forget it. And now for your news. Did you see Dick?"

"I did, my Lord."

"Is he any the better for the Bath waters?" enquired Ferrers.

"Yes, my Lord; he is mending apace."

"I'm glad to hear it," said the Earl. "Dick should be more careful of his health. A man, whose life is of greater consequence than a prime minister's, to go about raking as he does! Its a thousand pities!"

"So I've told him, my Lord, over and over again. 'D—n it, Dick,' says I, 'Think o' your wife, and the precious babies! For put in case——'"

"Curse your moralities, Jem," interrupted the Earl. "Fill your glass. Will Dick be all right in time for the Derby races?"*

"I make no doubt of it," replied Gabel.

"Does he mean to ride Meteor?" pursued the Earl.

"He does, my Lord."

"Ah, he's a first-rate Jockey," observed Ferrers, "and can win or lose as he pleases. Of course you sounded him on the subject of your errand?"

"I did, my Lord."

"Well, and what did Dick say?"

"Why he seemed rayther shy, in regard of your Lordship not coming down as you promised when he made Julius Cæsar lose at the last races—the first time as ever a horse out of Miss Dolly didn't win."

* The races *at* Derby, not the race *for* the Derby.

"Confound his insolence!" exclaimed the Earl. "Why he got a cool hundred out of my pocket by that affair."

"Yes," retorted Jem Gabel; "but he says you promised him *two* hundred, and he knows that you won two thousand. If his own honour as a jockey hadn't been concerned, he says—excuse me, my Lord—he'd split and blow you."

"He does, does he? He'd better mind what he's about. I'm up to a trick or two of his before he ever saw me. But what is the use of quarrelling? After all Dick's a capital fellow. Did you try to mollify him?"

"Yes, my Lord; and, moreover, I offered to be your security for two hundred, if as how he'd make Meteor safe to lose."

"You flatter me," said the Earl, with a slight sneer. "Did Dick seem satisfied with the guarantee?"

"The *what*, my Lord?"

"The security you proposed."

"I don't know as to that," replied Gabel;

"and 'twas no matter whether he did or no ; for he has took three hundred to win from another nobleman, who, Dick says, is an out-and-out gen'leman, and above doing anything as isn't fair, regular, and honorable."

"To prove which," returned Ferrers, "he *bribes* Dick, eh? who, on his part, is also above 'doing any thing as isn't fair, regular and honourable'. That's the true jockey style isn't it Jem?"

"What's a man to do, my Lord, with a wife of his bosom, and three sucking babies?" returned Gabel, with a pathetic air.

"Do! Why, 'make love at home, and go to bed betimes,' as Mat. Prior says," replied Ferrers.

"Dick an't a bad husband, take him altogether," muttered Gabel.

"None of your cant, Jem," said the Earl, "I hate it. Does Dick mean that Meteor shall win?"

"I rayther think he does, my Lord."

"The devil!" exclaimed Ferrers. "Take another glass of brandy, Jem."

“Thank you, my Lord.”

“What’s to be done, Jem?” asked the Earl in a coaxing and anxious tone of voice. “Give me your best advice. You know I’ve betted against Meteor; and may I be hanged, if a horse of Sir Thomas Stapleton’s shall ever win, if I can help it. Is there any way of coming over the groom?”

“I rayther think not; I should be afeard to try it,” answered Gabel.

“Afraid!” echoed the Earl, “Why?—Oh, the groom I suppose is another gentleman who ‘is above doing any thing as isn’t fair, regular and honourable?’”

“Can’t say, my Lord.”

“Try him, Jem, try him,” pursued Ferrers. “I don’t mind fifty guineas, and he could easily put a damp cloth over Meteor’s loins when he’s brought home hot in training. No horse’s wind can stand that, you know.”

“True, my Lord.”

“Or,” pursued the Earl, “he might give him a bolus of opium while he’s getting him

ready for the course. Men, not horses, make the race now-a-days.”

“Exactly so, my Lord; but ‘twont do,” said Gabel resolutely. “The groom’s stanch.”

“The farrier, then,” suggested Ferrers; “couldn’t we try him?”

“No use,” replied Jem. “All Sir Thomas’s people stand by him, through thick and thin. ‘Cause why? They say he’s a thorough good un. Now Dick has never rode for Sir Thomas afore, so I prefers Dick.”

“But you said he was shy.”

“Yes,” returned Gabel; “but money, you know—”

“Ah, I understand you,” rejoined the peer. “How much does the fellow want?”

“Why, I’m of opinion to think he’d do the trick for five hundred,” replied Gabel.

“I’ll see him in the bottomless pit of hell first, and then I won’t!” roared Ferrers rising and pacing furiously about the room, his constant habit when excited.

Jem Gabel helped himself to another glass

of brandy, and sat looking coolly at the Earl while he expended his rage.

After a few minutes, his lordship returned to the table, and betook himself to his never failing resource—the bottle.

“Have you looked at your book lately, my Lord?” quietly asked Gabel.

“To be sure. Do you think I’m a fool?”

“By no means, my Lord,” replied Jem. “I never thought *that* of your Lordship. How much do you think you’ll lose if Meteor wins?”

“Two thousand.”

“And how much shall you win if the horse loses?”

“About four thousand five hundred. But I’ll edge off, and make myself as safe as I can.”

“And so my Lord, let Sir Thomas Stapleton win, eh?”

“D—n—n!” vociferated the Earl.

“Now, my Lord,” pursued Gabel, “wouldn’t it be a wiser plan to tip Dick what he wants,

and so make all safe? You said just now that there wasn't no use in quarrelling; that's my maxim exact. Give honest Dick the five hundred, and Sir Thomas is done, and you pocket a clear four thousand."

"Well," replied the Earl, to whom the double project of injuring Sir Thomas Stapleton, and gaining a large sum was irresistible, "I suppose it must be so; but it's a heavy bribe. How much of it are you to finger, eh Jem? I suppose Dick and you play booty?"

"That's my affair, my Lord. I havn't touched much of your coin lately," said Gabel doggedly. "Besides, I can't travel to Bath for nothing."

"Certainly not," returned the Earl; "though by that ornamental patch on your forehead, it seems you have got *something* by your journey this time."

This banter was not much to Gabel's taste. He grinned an unwilling laugh, but did not reply.

"Now to business," resumed Ferrers. "Dick,

you say, will make Meteor safe to lose for five hundred pounds."

"Yes, my Lord," replied Jem, with something of reserve in his manner.

"Well, tell him he shall have the money."

"There's one condition, however," observed Gabel.

"Condition!" echoed Ferrers. "What more can the infernal jockey want?"

"Why he says he don't want to be bit no more. Excuse me, my Lord."

"What does he mean?"

"I must be plain with your Lordship," replied Jem. "In one word then, Dick says he can't trust you."

"No?"

"No."

"I wish the fellow was here," said Ferrers. "By G—, I'd give him a better sweating with my horsewhip, and bring his weight down more effectually than all the blankets and stoves in England, could do. Not trust me? D—n

his audacity! I've a great mind to go to Bath, and spoil him for riding at all."

"What good would that do?" said Jem with a sneer.

"Teach him a moral lesson," replied the Earl.

"Out of charity to Dick, I suppose?" retorted Gabel. "But charity, you know, my Lord, ought to begin at home."

"You are saucy, Sirrah," said the peer.

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," returned Jem. "But all this is no better than Tom-foolery. In one word, is Dick to have the five hundred, or not?"

Ferrers took a turn or two up and down the room, and then said,

"You talked about some *condition*. What is it?"

"Why Dick says as how the chink must be deposited for safe security in my hands at once, and then there can't be no mistake," replied Gabel.

"He does, does he?" said the Earl. "Now I'll tell you what Jem: I haven't a very flattering opinion of *your* honesty; and this manœuvre does not tend to improve it. Five hundred pounds in your hands! What do you take me for Sirrah?"

"What I take *you* for, is nothing to the purpose," said Gabel. "It's pretty plain what your Lordship takes *me* for. Nobody ever yet doubted my honour, and may I be cursed if even you shall do it with impunity. I'll split, if I don't, I'm — ; and Sir Thomas Stapleton's horse shall win, for I know he *can* do it, if Dick chooses. Good night, my Lord. You're not going to serve me, as you serv'd the Squire. I've a spirit above it. Good night."

Jem Gabel deliberately replaced the wrappers round his head, took up his hat, and was leaving the room, when the Earl, whose avarice got the better of his pride and resentment, said,

"Don't be hasty Jem. If I've offended you,

I'm sorry for it; but, you know, it's a little trying to a man's temper to be called upon, on a sudden, for five hundred pounds. It's a large sum, Jem—a very large sum. Your twitting me about Foxston, is not exactly fair, Jem; for you know it was chiefly on your persuasion that I cast him off, though it is to the Squire, that I am indebted for the honour of your acquaintance. But enough of this pro and con. When does Dick come to Derby?"

"In two days."

"Very well; the money shall be placed in your hands. Take another drop of brandy, Jem."

Jem swallowed the affront which had been offered him, and the brandy, at the same time.

CHAPTER VII.

EFFECTS OF GOOD BRANDY—AN AWKWARD REMINISCENCE—MR. JOHNSON OUT OF FAVOUR—SPECIMEN OF A LIE—A DEADLY HINT—GABEL AND HIS SWEET-HEART—A DISCOVERY—ITS EFFECT ON LORD FERRERS—HOW JEM GABEL WAS FRIGHTENED, AND WHO WAS THE MIDNIGHT VISITER.

Do you find
Your patience so predominant in your nature,
That you can let this go?

MACBETH.

THE companions were now getting drunk together very satisfactorily; and, considering their late dispute, were becoming, in a surprising manner, excessively friendly and cordial to each other. It may be questioned, indeed, whether at this moment Jem would have cut his master's throat unless for a highly valuable consideration; or whether the peer would have gone

very much out of his way to hang Jem—so kindly is the operation of good cognac brandy on congenial souls.

“I am glad to see you take your cups cheerfully, Jem,” said Ferrers. “I told you the brandy was of the right sort. I import it myself direct from France, and always take a little of it with my coffee the first thing in the morning. Don’t spare it: here’s another bottle on the table.”

“Thank you, my Lord; but I think I’ve had a’most enough.”

“Enough! not half enough yet,” said Ferrers. “We have plenty of time before us. And now, Jem, tell me all about that queer blow which you’ve got on one side your forehead.”

Jem hemmed a little and scratched his head, as not knowing exactly how to begin.

“Do you recollect, my Lord the morning of the earthquake in London about six years ago?” said he at length.

“To be sure I do. Why do you ask?”

"You was in Tyburn Lane that morning."

"I was. What then?"

"A soldier was preaching, and a dead woman come along upon a shutter," pursued Gabel.

This was an awkward reminiscence for the Earl. He writhed under it, and ejaculated, with visible annoyance, "What the devil has all this to do with my question about the blow on your forehead? Fill your glass, Jem, and don't travel out of the record."

"I can't drink no more," said Gabel.

"I begin to think I've had enough, myself, this time," observed Ferrers. "Never mind the rest of the story, Jem. Let us change the subject; or perhaps you'd like to go to bed. You know the way to your room."

"Stop a bit, my Lord," returned Gabel.
"My story concerns *you* as well as me."

"As how, Jem, as how?"

"Why in regard to a chap as tried to murder you in the lane that morning?"

Ferrers started.

"How came you to know that?" enquired he.

"Every body knows it," replied Jem. "Wasn't it all next day in the Courant and the Flying Post? Moreover, I see it with my own eyes."

"Saw what?"

"Why the young blackguard try to shoot you, my Lord."

"Where were you then?" asked Ferrers.

"In the crowd looking on."

"The devil you were! Why then didn't you come forward to my assistance?"

"For a very good reason, my Lord," replied Gabel. "Didn't Mr. Johnson stand between you and the bloody-minded young imp? And would it ha' been altogether convenient and prudent just at that identical time for me to claim acquaintance with your Lordship afore Mr. Johnson?"

"True, Jem, true. But I would rather owe my life to you than to Johnson. Curse Johnson! I hate him for always taking my lady's

part. He is in league with those infernal Merediths, and never lets slip an opportunity of saying a good word for Stapleton. Then he has got a sort of pious twist, something after the manner of my canting cousin, Lady Huntingdon. May the devil confound the whole set! I wish they were all in flames! To be sure I can't do very well without Johnson yet; but never mind; I'll punish him some of these days. I 'bide my time, as the old proverb says. If I don't make him repent it, may the flesh rot inch by inch from my bones upon a gibbet! Reach me the bottle, Jem."

"I don't fancy Mr. Johnson, any more than you do, my Lord," observed Gabel; "but d—n him! he behaved like a trump that morning, if he didn't I'm——"

"Say no more, Jem," interrupted the Earl. "I hate to hear the fellow's name. And then he obstructs my projects, and stands so stiff upon his cursed honesty. Honesty! I'm sick of the word. A good steward should do what his master likes, and not prate about honesty."

Name him no more Jem ; but go on with your story. We shall be in the dark soon : the candles are getting low."

"Well, then, my Lord," pursued Gabel, "I've seen that precious young Hempseed at Bath."

"Who do you mean?"

"Why the chap as was going to shoot you with your own pistol in Tyburn Lane," replied Jem.

"Ah ! What is the scoundrel's name?" interrogated the Earl.

"Bernard."

"Right," said Ferrers, as a slight contortion passed over his visage at the bare mention of the name — one which could not fail to bring a degrading recollection of his cruelty and guilt. He was, moreover, stricken with fear ; for since his interview with Foxston at Paddington, he felt that Judith's death lay at his door, and although, in committing the act of violence against her, he did not contemplate so dreadful a result, as that which took place,

the thought of her brother's exposing him was insupportable. "I hope you didn't lose sight of him, Jem," he added anxiously.

"Why no, not exactly," replied Gabel. "But somehow the precious scamp slipped his carcase away from me."

"How infernally unlucky!" exclaimed the Earl. "You must be a wretched bungler. How did it happen?"

"I'll tell your Lordship," returned Jem, relying on his inventive powers for a plausible and extempore lie. "I was a walking one evening quite quiet along Avon Street in Bath, as I was returning home after discoursing with Dick, when who should I see coming along, but this here precious young vagabond? I know'd him again in a twinkling, and kept my eye pretty sharp on him. In a minute, he comes close up to a woman, and, without more ado, begins ill-using of her. You know I could never bear to stand by quietly, and see a woman ill-used. No, no, I'm not the man

for that, my Lord. It puts my blood up, in less than half a second. It does, indeed."

"Curse your blood!" exclaimed the Earl, interrupting his companion's eloquence. "None of your fine sentiments, Jem. Come at once to your story. What did you do?"

"Why, I knock'd him down."

"Good! What followed?"

"Why, what does he do, thereupon," continued Gabel, "but afore one could wink, jumps up on his legs, and——"

"His legs!" interrupted Ferrers. "What sort of a friend are you? His legs! Why didn't you plant your knee on his chest and throttle him with a stiff twist of his cravat when you had him safe on the ground? The woman was nothing; but you should have done it on *my* behalf. Don't you know that the villain has threatened to take my life?"

"No, my Lord."

"No!" echoed Ferrers. "What's the use of your reading the Flying Post? it was distinctly stated in that paper that the assassin

FERRERS.

vowed to murder me the first opp
Well, what did he do when he got
legs?"

"Knocked *me* down, my Lord, with a cu
gel loaded at the end with lead. I didn't come
to myself for an hour."

"And so this is the history of your broken
head, is it?"

"Yes, as I hope to be saved!" replied the
pious Jem.

"Have you any reason to suppose the fellow
lives in Bath?" enquired the Earl.

"I know it," replied Gabel.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Ferrers. "That young
fellow will certainly come to the gallows, some
of these days. It would be charity to him to
prevent such a consummation. Therefore, ho
nest Jem, it would be but kind in you, to
wards himself, and considerate to the public,
to prevent so edifying a spectacle. Give him
a comforter, Jem; you understand me."

"Not exactly, my Lord."

"Why not?" retorted the Earl. "Has not

the blood-thirsty wretch tried to slaughter you, and vowed to do the same good turn for me? Would you have his soul laden with unnecessary crimes? Is not revenge for his attempt on your own life, sufficient motive, to say nothing of preventing him from killing me? You are not usually dull of comprehension, good Jem."

"O, I see!" responded Gabel. "Your Lordship means it would be a good job to—"

And here Jem made a significant action with his closed hand across his throat.

"Exactly! that's it," said the peer. "In short, that there may be no mistake, I'll give you, my excellent friend, or any of your worthy acquaintance, one hundred pounds to make a quiet, comfortable end of that young ruffian."

Jem had already made up his mind to do the deed on his own account as soon as possible inasmuch as, since the escape of Bernard from the snare suddenly set for him at Bath, Gabel lived in a kind of *improved* dread

of the gallows. It could not be otherwise than extremely unpleasant to honest Gabel to live with the rope about his neck. Lord Ferrers knew nothing of this; and, to do him justice, was ignorant of his companion's former practice as a cracksman. The prospect of a hundred pounds as a bonus for doing what seemed to Jem to be necessary to ensure his own existence, was a piece of luck he had not anticipated.

Chuckles within himself at this dainty prospect, he was nevertheless wary enough to conceal every sign of exultation, and, as if the diabolical affair were merely a matter of business, coolly replied, "It shall be done, my Lord."

"Spoken like a man," exclaimed Ferrers. "Couldn't you set off for Bath directly, my good friend?"

"No," replied Gabel, with a perceptible tremor. "I'd rather go to London."

"To London! What would be the use of that?"

"Why, the precious devil's imp will be there soon; and what's more, I know exactly where to pitch upon him."

"How excessively fortunate!" exclaimed the Earl. "I'm always lucky. But where did you acquire this knowledge? and how did you learn that the fellow lived at Bath?"

"I got it all out of a young woman," replied Gabel; "she's a sort of sweet-heart of mine, my Lord, though I never saw her afore I went to Bath about that business with Dick. This here young woman, my Lord, lived as a maid-servant in the very house where Bernard is employed as a shopman. O, he's a low fellow, depend on't. She twigged him in Avon Street the very night I had the scuffle with him—as nice a young woman as ever you see; only she was turned away from her place in regard of some silver spoons which she was as innocent about as the lamb unborn, poor creature!"

"Confound your sentimentalities! Come to the point," interposed the Earl. "What did she tell you?"

"She told me," replied Gabel, "that she had overheard Bernard and her master talk about this here precious young scamp going in the middle of this very month to London to see the parson of Paddington about some business. I know Paddington well."

"And so do I," said the Earl.

"It's a nice lonely place, especially about the church-yard close to where the parson lives, i'sn't it my Lord?"

"Very," returned Ferrers, as a recollection of his adventure in the haunted Manor House crossed his memory.

"Now," said Gabel, looking highly important, "I've got the strangest thing of all to tell you, my Lord."

"Out with it, man."

"Why, this here young woman, as I told your Lordship about, says she has often heard her master and young Bernard talking together concerning Mr. Johnson, and praising him up to the skies."

"What Mr. Johnson?"

"Mr. Johnson of the Lount, to be sure, my Lord. She says young Bernard is often talking about the Lount."

As Gabel uttered this, the Earl was lifting a tumbler of water to his lips by way of cooler to the brandy he had quaffed so plenteously. But the words seemed to petrify him: his arm was suddenly stopped in its ascent; his mouth remained open; and his eyes stared in painful amazement, as if some hateful thing had sprung up before him. Recovering from this momentary palsy, he dashed the goblet into atoms on the table, and springing from his chair, paced rapidly about with the frantic gesticulations of a madman, clenching his fists, stamping on the floor, and vociferating all manner of horrible imprecations.

"Johnson in league with that vagabond cut-throat, Bernard!" he exclaimed. "Who could have suspected such a thing? The hellish traitor! May the fiend write perdition on my house in a flash of lightning, if I don't go to night and set fire to the Lount! Johnson

shan't live! I swear it! What! my own steward enter into fellowship with a ruffian who made a murderous attack on me? Ay, ay; they'll scheme, they'll contrive, they'll plot, till, by Heaven! I shall hardly know whether my head is on my shoulders or not. Johnson wants to see me dead. But his skin shall crack and blacken in fire of my kindling, and may the fiend bear his soul away in the flames! Will you go with me to the Lount to-night, Jem?"

"Sleep upon it, my Lord," said Jem, who liked not the project, as plunder was out of the question. "Sleep upon it, I say. A wise man should take care of himself. If you was to do such a thing, you'd be nosed, you know, depend on't. Bide your time, as you said just now. You've had too much brandy to-night. Go to bed, my Lord. The lights are at the last flicker, and I don't altogether like to talk of such things as you mention in a great gloomy room like this half buried in darkness,

with a nasty flash of flame every now and then out of the socket, like lightning in an open grave."

"Johnson shall die, I tell you!" muttered the Earl, coming close up to Gabel, and speaking almost in a whisper.

Even while he thus spoke, Ferrers's face underwent so great a change, that the most familiar of his acquaintance would not, at that moment, have known him. The horrid metamorphosis was wrought by the first access of that dreadful idea which made the Earl, in his own mind, already a murderer! With a deformed and almost livid visage, and a palpitating heart, he gazed, as if seeking for support, into the eyes of his companion, whose very soul he sought to read. For several minutes, his attitude and the hideous expression of his face (as it was ever and anon revealed by the struggling flames of the candles) remained fixed, nor did he utter another word. Gabel, too, was silent. The midnight quiet

was that of death ; when, hark ! a loud ringing is heard at the outer gate, not far from the house.

Gabel started to his feet. " What's that ?" said he, looking round him with frenzied gestures. " Do you expect any body to-night ?"

" No," replied the Earl.

" Let me go," faltered Gabel ; " let me go, I say. I wish to go, my Lord ; I feel ill ; good night !"

" Stay where you are, Jem," said Ferrers. " Don't leave me. Why you're not frightened ?"

" Frightened ! No. But my head-aches, and I want a gasp of the fresh air."

The ringing was now repeated violently, accompanied by a heavy knocking, to which the previous silence, and the solemnity of the hour, imparted a more vehement and thrilling character. " Let me pass, my Lord !" thundered the ruffian in terror-stricken accents.

" Isn't there a back way out ?"

" No."

" What, not into the garden ?"

"You are mad, sirrah. What do you mean?"

While Gabel, shaking in every limb, stood staring at the window fronting the lawn, a man was seen, by the faint light of a crescent moon, to approach it cautiously. He looked in for a moment and disappeared.

Quick as thought, Gabel ran to the window and fastened the shutters; and Lord Ferrers, in utter amazement, seized the bell-rope intending to summon his servants. His arm, however, was stayed by Gabel.

"Not that, not that, my Lord!" ejaculated he, breathing hard as he spoke. "The door—the door! Barricade the door! Where are your pistols?"

Before Ferrers had time to reply, a servant entered the room.

"Mr. Johnson, my Lord," said he.

Gabel reeled backward a few paces, and caught at the table for support, or he would have fallen. The name of Mr. Johnson sounded ominously in his ears on account of the

correspondence which he knew subsisted between that gentleman and young Bernard. Lord Ferrers, also, was astounded, and trembled visibly when, as though by some dire, midnight spell, he whom he had just threatened to murder was announced. It was as if his intention had become mysteriously known, and the doomed man, by an instinctive impulse, had suddenly appeared at that dead hour to dare him to do his worst, or to reclaim him from his demoniac passions.

Gabel was the first to find breath. "Did he come *alone?*" gasped the ruffian.

"He did, Sir."

"Mr. Johnson, at this time of night!" exclaimed Ferrers, panting with emotion. "Does he want to see me?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Did you tell him I was engaged?"

"I did, my Lord."

"Well?"

"He says he must see you, my Lord."

"Very strange!" muttered Ferrers. "Show him into the drawing room."

"You may go to bed now, Jem," said the Earl to that worthy personage drawing him aside. "I didn't think it of you, Gabel, but you are a coward, and you have made me one, almost."

"Not so, my Lord," answered Jem.
"Twas all along of the brandy."

"Well, go! And mind, not a word about our conversation."

"In course not. Good night! my Lord."

Taking a candle from the footman, Jem withdrew.

"Pray sirrah," said Ferrers, addressing the servant. "Did *you* look in at the window just now?"

"I did, my Lord," replied the man, in a flurry. "But I hope your Lordship won't be angry. Twas only to see whether your Lordship was here, or whether you had gone to bed."

The Earl stepped to the table, and seizing

one of the massive silver candlesticks, threw it with great force at the man's head, saying,

"Let that teach you better manners another time; and be d——d to you."

Dipping his head, the servant avoided the missile, which, had it struck him, would, in all probability, have fractured his skull.

"Now, sirrah, light me to Mr. Johnson," said Lord Ferrers, somewhat relieved of his fear, and walking with the grave and ludicrous pomposity of a half-drunken man towards the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VIII.

FLIGHT OF LADY FERRERS—THE EARL'S CONSTERNATION AND RAGE—
DETERMINATION OF MR. JOHNSON—HUMILIATION OF FERRERS—
LISTENER AT THE DOOR.

I come,—

And, I beseech you, hear me, who profess
Myself your faithful servant ; yet that dare
Less appear so, in comforting your evils,
Than such as most seem your's.

WINTER'S TALE.

"WELL, Mr. Johnson," said Lord Ferrers, stalking into the drawing-room. "A visit from you, at this time of night, is a very rare occurrence. Indeed, I do not recollect a similar instance. To what am I indebted for it?"

"I come from the Lount, my Lord," replied Mr. Johnson.

"So I should think," said the Earl.

"Where," pursued Mr. Johnson, "I have left Lady Ferrers."

"What?"

"Where I have left Lady Ferrers, my Lord."

"Lady Ferrers at the Lount! Impossible!" vociferated the Earl. "Am I dreaming?"

"My Lord," resumed Mr. Johnson, "you and I are both free from sleep, and it is well we are so, for grave affairs demand our attention."

"Explain yourself, Sir, and be brief."

"I will, my Lord. I repeat that Lady Ferrers is now at my house, and declares she will never return to Stanton."

The Earl looked perfectly mystified at this communication. He closed his eyes—rubbed his hand over them two or three times, as if, believing himself to be under a dram-created delusion, he sought to arouse and correct his power of vision. On looking, however, again about the room, he still saw Mr. Johnson seat-

ed opposite to him, as before with a grave and important aspect.

Ferrers immediately arose and rang the bell. Mr. Johnson, meanwhile, continued mute till the first bewildering surprise of the Earl should have passed away.

A servant soon attended in answer to the summons.

“Where is the Countess’s maid?” demanded Ferrers.

“Not in the house, my Lord.”

“Not in the house! How do you know that?”

“I heard the house-keeper say so, my Lord.”

“How long has she been gone?”

“I don’t know, my Lord.”

“Do you know where Lady Ferrers is?

“No, my Lord; I’ll ask the housekeeper, if your Lordship pleases.”

“My Lord,” interrupted Mr. Johnson, “your incredulity is not very flattering to me, who, during fifty years employment in your family have never been known to utter an

untruth. I have remained in my chair quietly and patiently enough, Heaven knows ! while you examined your servant before my face in corroboration of my words. Excuse me, my Lord, I can bear it no longer.”

“ You may go, sirrah,” said Ferrers dismissing the footman.

There was a pause, during which the Earl seemed to be in a state of stupefaction.

“ You must admit, Mr. Johnson,” he said at length, “ that this news is sufficient to bewilder me. What does Lady Ferrers do at the Lount ?”

“ She is in a state of great perturbation, my Lord,” replied the steward, “ as you may readily imagine, after what I have already told you, namely, that she has resolved not to return to Stanton.”

“ Not return ! Why not ? Who has prompted her to this ?” demanded Ferrers.

“ Her own heart, my Lord, it seems ; for she has complained of your Lordship’s violence.”

"Have *you* been her adviser, Mr. Johnson?" asked the Earl, with a sinister glance at his companion.

"I have advised nothing, my Lord; I come here as a peace-maker," replied Mr. Johnson.

Ferrers leant his head on his hand, and remained some time in deep abstraction; Mr. Johnson, too, was silent; he cared not to disturb the musings of the Earl; they appeared to be signs of awakening remorse, and he was willing that their working should be undisturbed. The silence, therefore, remained unbroken for a time. Mr. Johnson drew from it the most favorable auguries. He knew that the Earl's wilfulness had never been so seriously opposed. He had, moreover, never seen his Lordship so much affected, and he fully reckoned that when the Earl should speak again, it would be in a tone of contrition.

What then, must have been Mr. Johnson's surprise, when Lord Ferrers, lifting his head, vociferated,

"Villain! this has been your contrivance.

You are in the pay of Sir William Meredith, Sir. And I am not sure that you are not a go-between as regards my wife and Sir Thomas Stapleton. I should not be surprised, indeed, if that fellow was at this moment in your house with Lady Ferrers."

Mr. Johnson was now, in his turn, stricken mute with wonder. That he—the whole of whose long life had been passed in promoting good will between man and man—who had laboured with honest zeal for the interest of the noble family in whose service he had been engaged from boyhood—whose ways had been ways of righteousness, and whose paths had been paths of peace—he, who had brought up a daughter in the purest innocence, and who held that "saintly chastity is dear to heaven,"—that such a man, so single-hearted, faithful, pious, and uncorrupt, should be branded by the foul name of pander, was almost beyond the evidence of his own ears.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed, "think, I beseech you, of what you have just said, and un-

say it ; unsay it, my Lord, on your own account, and on the account of your most excellent lady, if not out of justice to me. I cannot, will not believe that your words are uttered with a full knowledge of their import."

"Johnson," replied the Earl, somewhat abashed by the energy with which his steward had spoken, "you know you have thwarted me on many occasions lately ; and you cannot deny, moreover, that Sir William Meredith finds in you a willing vindicator of his wretched plans, even when they militate against my will."

"With respect to my thwarting your Lordship," rejoined Mr. Johnson, "I am conscious only of having given my disinterested advice against measures which I knew could bring nothing but disaster in their train ; and in your cooler moments you have more than once recognized the policy of my views. If I have given any particular support to Sir William Meredith, (of which, however, I am not aware), is that a reason for charging me with practising against his honour in the dearest

point—the degradation and ruin of his daughter?"

"Are you not in league with Sir Thomas Stapleton, Sir?"

"My Lord!"

"I say," pursued Ferrers, "do you not know that Stapleton entertains damnable intentions towards my wife?"

"I do *not* know it," answered the steward; "nor will I believe it. My Lord, my Lord, I owe every thing in life to you and your family, and I have endeavoured that my faithfulness should prove my gratitude. If, however, your Lordship can seriously imagine I am capable of the infamy you impute to me, suffer me to retire from your service."

"I care not how soon," returned the Earl.

"It shall be done immediately, my Lord," rejoined Mr. Johnson, calmly. "My commission of to-night, shall be my final act in connexion with you; but that *must* be discharged out of duty to you and to your lady."

"Well, Sir?"

"I came here, my Lord, at this late hour, to do my best to reconcile you and your Countess. You have disqualified me from fulfilling that intention. It is necessary, therefore, that I apprise your Lordship of my design of proceeding to-morrow to Henbury that I might acquaint Sir William Meredith with the present unfortunate, and let me add, unmerited, position of his daughter, and consult with him as to what steps it will be most advisable to take on her behalf."

"And so, Sir," rejoined the Earl, "you conceive this is the way, in which you can best approve yourself my faithful steward."

"Pardon me, my Lord, I am your steward no longer," returned Mr. Johnson.

"Has Sir William Meredith, or Sir Thomas Stapleton, promised you employment, eh Sir? Which?"

"I shall not heed your taunts, Lord Ferrers, nor reply to them," said the steward.

"Does Lady Ferrers go with you to Henbury?" asked the Earl.

"She does."

"That's your *opinion*, Mr. Johnson," said Ferrers, pulling the bell. "But it's wrong to be positive—a positive man is generally in error, and then he looks confoundedly foolish. I shall soon convince you that Lady Ferrers will do no such thing as go to her father."

The servant appeared again, looking half asleep, and wondering at these repeated summonses at one o'clock in the morning, a very unusual thing at Stanton Harold, for as my Lord saw little or no company, the house was, for the most part, quiet soon after ten at night, by which hour the noble owner was generally drunk and a'bed.

"Tell the coachman to get the carriage ready without a moment's loss of time," was the Earl's mandate to his footman. "If he lingers, I'll break every bone in his body. Don't forget to mention that, sirrah."

"Very well, my Lord," said the man hastening out of the room.

"I comprehend your intention," observed Mr. Johnson; "but I assure your Lordship that Lady Ferrers will not be persuaded to return."

"Persuaded!" roared the Earl. "Do you think, Sir, that I do not know my rights as a husband? She won't be *persuaded*, eh?—Sir, I shall *order* her to return to her home, and let her refuse at her peril."

"But before I left the Lount," pursued Mr. Johnson, "her Ladyship had retired to bed."

"Then I'll drag her out of it!" vociferated Ferrers.

"Should your Lordship do this," rejoined Mr. Johnson, "let me admonish you to weigh well the effect which such an outrage would produce in every corner of the county."

"Outrage?" echoed Ferrers. "Outrage! Curse your one-sided sophistry!—What sort of outrage is that which Lady Ferrers has committed on me—her husband, her lord—in

quitting my house at night, and lurking in that of my steward? How will your infernal special pleading answer that?"

"The world, my Lord, will vindicate her," replied Mr. Johnson.

"How, Sir!"

"And more than that," pursued the steward, "her Ladyship would have her remedy at the hands of the first magistrate to whom she might apply."

This was a new source of mystification to the Earl. A magistrate! What could a magistrate have to do with disputes between a peer of the realm and his wife? Alas! the interesting and all-absorbing topics he had discussed with Gabel since dinner, added to the alcohol he had imbibed with that worthy character, had obliterated all memory of his savage assault against his Countess. His Lordship, therefore, contented himself by characterising Mr. Johnson's last observation as nonsense, enforcing his opinion by sundry oaths and contemptuous epithets.

But when the steward reminded him of his unmanly conduct to the Countess—of his running at her with a knife, and of her being rescued from destruction only by the accidental entrance to the room of a man who was quite a stranger to her, but whose name she had since ascertained,—when he added that Lady Ferrers resolved to swear the peace against him—to bring that man forward as a witness to the attempt on her life—and to follow up her proceedings by an appeal to parliament for a divorce on the ground of cruelty,—the Earl's countenance fell, and the spirit of bravado left him. The furious reproaches he intended to heap on Mr. Johnson in respect of Hugh Bernard were, moreover, abandoned.

“The carriage is quite ready, my Lord,” said a footman entering the room.

“I shall not want it to-night,” returned Ferrers. “Go. Shut the door.”

A pause of some duration ensued, during which Lord Ferrers revolved in his mind all the disastrous consequences which an expo-

sure such as Mr. Johnson indicated would infallibly bring to pass. It might appear incredible to one not thoroughly acquainted with his Lordship's character, that a man who had ventured on such insults and threats as had marked the conduct of the Earl in the present interview could descend to supplication. But his meanness was proportionate to his insolence.

"You said, Mr. Johnson," observed he, at length, in a mild tone, "that you came hither as a peace-maker. What would you have me do?"

Mr. Johnson saw that an important change had been wrought in the mind of Ferrers. His fierce and arrogant employer was now, in a manner, at his feet. Most men would have profited by so signal a humiliation—would have held off, or even adopted, in their turn, an offensive demeanour, resentful taunts, or expressions of triumph. The good steward did none of these things. He was actuated only by one wish—that of healing the domes-

tic feuds in a family to which he had long been attached by respect and gratitude.

“Tell me, Johnson,” repeated the Earl, “what is best to be done.”

“I am most happy,” replied the steward, utterly forgetful of his own wrongs, “to find that your Lordship takes a juster view of the matter.”

“I was drunk, Johnson; forget all I have said, and give me your advice.”

“Permit me, in the first place, my Lord, to express to her Ladyship your earnest desire to see her, and your readiness to enter into any explanations she may request.”

“You have my permission freely,” returned Ferrers.

“Should this produce the effect on the Countess that I anticipate, and it will be my task to endeavour that it shall do so,” pursued Mr. Johnson, “let me earnestly recommend your Lordship to abstain from any allusions to Sir Thomas Stapleton. Such allusions can only irritate yourself, and grievously

wound the feelings of my Lady, who, I solemnly believe is wholly free from contamination either in thought, word or deed."

"I will be guided by you, Johnson," said the Earl. "Is there any thing else?"

"Why——" Mr. Johnson hesitated. "No, my Lord."

"You were about to speak, and checked yourself," observed Ferrers. "Out with it, Johnson. Don't be afraid. I am now on the stool of repentance," he added with a mortified smile, "and must not make a wry face at trifles. Speak man! make a clear breast of it."

"Then, my Lord," rejoined the steward, "may I venture to use an old man's privilege—the privilege of one grown grey and infirm in the service of your house, and admonish your Lordship against the fatal habit of drinking?"

Lord Ferrers started, and turned pale; but he suppressed the rage which was mounting in his bosom.

"Turn this over in your mind, my Lord,'

added the steward, “ and pardon my presumption in this last instance.”

“ I will think of it,” muttered Ferrers ambiguously.

“ Suffer me now to take my leave,” said Mr. Johnson, bowing, “ happy that my last act in your Lordship’s service should promise so fortunate a result.”

“ Last act! What do you mean Johnson? O, I understand. The resignation. Nonsense, man. I thought all that had been forgotten. Think no more of it—I musn’t lose you.”

“ My Lord, do not deem me captious or quarrelsome,” returned the steward; “ but you have called me ‘ pandar’.”

“ Well, well, I ask your pardon. Won’t that do? There! Give me your hand.”

Mr. Johnson warmly grasped Lord Ferrers’s proffered hand, and, with a full heart, exclaiming, “ Enough! enough!” the Earl and his steward separated.

But sincere as was the reconciliation on the

part of Mr. Johnson, it was only a hollow truce as regarded his Lordship, who had been compelled to eat his own words—to manifest his ferocious pride, in order, it would seem, that he might the more signally be humbled—to supplicate assistance from a man he hated—and finally to beg his pardon. Here was degradation for a peer! He felt it, and it stirred up within him all kinds of projects for revenge — revenge against his lady, and against Johnson.

Having ordered more brandy (for he felt exhausted by the contrasted emotions he had lately undergone), and dismissed his servants from further attendance that night, he sat up alone drinking and concocting plans to annoy and injure the only two honourable beings in the world who continued to cherish the least esteem for him. He had long since quarrelled with every member in his family—he had disgusted all his acquaintance—and no respectable friends were left him but his Countess and Mr. Johnson. The happiness,

if not the life, of these he determined to destroy.

His self-congratulations on having cajoled Mr. Johnson were not abated by any doubt as to the trustworthiness of that individual. He knew perfectly well that Johnson could keep a secret, and he had no fear that, on the present occasion, the fact of his ferocious assault on his Countess would be suffered to transpire, nor that any one would be acquainted with the measures she threatened to pursue, or with the humiliating effects which such threats produced on himself. No : he could fully rely on Mr. Johnson ; and, should he be successful in making his peace with Lady Ferrers, he had nothing to dread from her.

With convictions such as these, he lulled himself to security. It was manifest that there could be no danger from any other quarter.

In this, however, if he did not "reckon without his host," he reckoned without his guest. It will be recollected that Jem Gabel was in a state of frantic alarm at the ringing

of the outer bell at midnight: this trepidation was not much diminished on hearing Mr. Johnson's name announced; for as he knew the steward was in communication with Hugh Bernard, he feared (what will not guilty fear suggest?) that, after his perpetration in Avon Street Bath, he had been traced to Stanton Harold, and that Mr. Johnson had been requested by Bernard, to take measures for securing him.

This dread haunted his mind even after Lord Ferrers had consigned him to his couch. It was a matter of life and death to him to escape instantly, if his apprehensions were well-founded. But how was he to ascertain this? Could he not listen at the key-hole of the drawing-room door, and so acquaint himself with what passed within? Divesting himself of his shoes, and treading with the noiseless steps of a practised house-breaker, he took up his post at the door, dexterously regaining his own room every time the

bell rang and resuming his place on the dismissal of the footman.

The slight allusion to himself in the course of the conversation between the Earl and Mr. Johnson, did not annoy him in the least, and he was delighted beyond measure, to think that the interview, in other respects, concerned him not in the remotest degree. This was by no means his only cause for rejoicing. The fact that Lady Ferrers had been terrified out of her own house at night by the deadly attack of her husband—that she threatened to bring the matter before parliament, and that such threat had so alarmed the Earl as to wring from him a series of mortifying concessions—were things that, in addition to the threatened murder of Mr. Johnson, Gabel felt he could turn to good account in case his aristocratical employer should not patiently submit to be plundered.

CHAPTER IX.

MORNING AT THE LOUNT—LADY FERRERS AND SARAH—JUDITH'S BOY—HOW TO PATCH UP A DOMESTIC FEUD—A CHILD'S DEFIANCE.

Fate ne'er strikes deep but when unkindness joins:
But there's a fate in kindness,
Still to be least returned where most 'tis given.

DRYDEN.

WEARIED with vain regrets in respect of the unhappy alliance she had made—oppressed with sorrow, and terrified at the recent attempt upon her life by her furious husband, Lady Ferrers arose from her bed after a sleepless night at Mr. Johnson's farm-house. She was entirely ignorant of the steward's mission on the preceding night to Stanton Harold, and her purpose to go to Henbury

and confide her griefs to her father, remained unchanged.

But how was Sir William likely to receive her? and in what mood was it probable that he would listen to her complaints? She had married Lord Ferrers in defiance of his repeated injunctions to the contrary. By giving her no dowry, he had, in the strongest manner, marked his detestation of the match. To go to him now with a bitter detail of grievances was only to demonstrate the consequences of her own rashness, and to confirm the wisdom of his parental interference. To this consideration alone may be attributed her patient endurance of insults and wrongs for the last four years; for since her marriage in 1752, only one year (the first) had been tolerable; and during the whole of her wedded life, she had not seen her father more than twice, and then partly by chance.

In spite, however, of the estrangement which had subsisted between her and Sir William, and notwithstanding her perfect con-

sciousness of the disadvantages under which she would be placed in an appeal to the protection of her parent—though she anticipated painful reflections and rebukes from his lips—though she knew that her darling vanity must be sacrificed—she felt nevertheless that no other measure was left to secure her feelings from mortifying taunts, and her life from danger. It was now no time to indulge in the petty caprices of pride: she was in extremity, and must submit to acknowledge her error and crave pardon for disobedience.

Harrassed by these distracting thoughts, and pale from want of rest, Lady Ferrers made her appearance in the breakfast room at the Lount. The good steward and his daughter were seated at the table, and received their guest with humble, but hearty courtesy. It had been planned between Mr. Johnson and Sarah that the mission of the last night, and its results, should be gradually communicated to her Ladyship by the latter, under an idea that matters of this kind are better discussed by two women than by persons of different sex.

As soon, therefore, as breakfast was over, Mr. Johnson withdrew, and Sarah and the Countess were left together. Making some excuse for the delay in the arrival of the post-chaise which was to convey Lady Ferrers and the steward to Henbury, Sarah proposed a stroll in the pleasant grounds of the farm, as a refreshment to the agitated spirits of her guest.

And never was a morning more propitious for such a purpose. All nature was revelling under the joyous influence of Spring. The hedge-rows were white with blossoms, and the mild wind was heavy with their odours. Beauty was visible every where, from the over-arching sky of azure to the green meadows spangled with golden buttercups. In shady places, the surface of the earth was covered by the deep blue of the field hyacinth, or by "the yellow cowslip and the pale primrose;" while, as if nothing should be wanting to complete the joyous effect, the vernal birds, thrushes, ring-doves, wild pigeons and cuckoos, made the air musical with their hearty and thrilling notes.

Even in the tame and flat country surrounding the Lount, these gladsome works of Spring, made earth and air conspire to fill the heart of human beings with happy thoughts, and gay anticipations. Sarah Johnson, now advanced to glorious womanhood, looked like a sylvan goddess moving with innocent pride about the rich and decorated meadows ; her companion, on the contrary, beautiful as she was, seemed tortured by care, and abstracted from all around—a creature for whom Nature spread her charms in vain.

“ My dear Lady,” said Sarah, after attempting in vain to draw the Countess’s attention to the lovely objects surrounding them, “ do not give way to this cloudy melancholy. All may be well yet.”

“ Never, Sarah !” replied Lady Ferrers. “ It is impossible. My life is poisoned.”

“ No, no,” rejoined Miss Johnson, who had been acquainted over-night with the Earl’s conduct to his wife, “ you must not despair. Some trouble, of which you are ignorant, must

have crossed my Lord, and put him beside himself. Depend on it, he is sorry enough now, and ashamed too, and ready to throw himself at your feet and crave forgiveness.”

“Alas! you know not his character as I do,” said the Countess. “That he is in a state of great perplexity at my absence, I can readily conceive; his pride is hurt at my taking such a step, more especially as he knows not whither I have gone. Besides, he may fear that, in my dismay and bewilderment at his outrage, I may have anticipated his threats and laid violent hands on myself. He would not, indeed, care for the loss of me; but the general execration he must in such an event encounter, would be more than he could bear.”

“What if I tell you,” said Sarah, “that my Lord knows where you are—that he has fully acknowledged his fault—that he is repentant, and has expressed an earnest desire to be permitted to see you, and to promise amendment for the future?”

Lady Ferrers gazed with an incredulous look into the face of her young companion.

"You tax me beyond belief," said she at length. "How can Lord Ferrers know where I am? Who has done this?"

"My father," replied Sarah.

"When?"

"Last night after your Ladyship had retired to rest."

"I am sorry for this," said the Countess, as a shade of displeasure passed over her brow. "Mr. Johnson should have consulted me. Did my Lord, then, come here?"

"No, dear Lady; my father went to Stanton."

"What, at midnight?" interrogated Lady Ferrers.

"Yes," replied Sarah. "And it was fortunate he did so, for he found his Lordship still up and ignorant of your having left the house. Had he discovered it himself, the consequences might have been dreadful. As it is,

my father has fortunately been able to turn the circumstance to good account."

"In what manner?" asked the Countess.

"By preventing any public manifestation of my Lord's rage, and by making him sensible of his injustice towards your Ladyship," replied Sarah.

"Still, I wish Mr. Johnson had not gone to Stanton," said Lady Ferrers, musingly. "I can never live with my husband again."

"But," pursued Sarah, "my Lord has expressed his contrition, and is anxious to be reconciled to you."

"Ah, Sarah," rejoined the Countess, "this sounds plausibly in your young ears; but you know not yet the deceits of men. Tell me—what remonstrances, what arguments, could your father have used, to work thus far on the stubborn temper of Lord Ferrers?"

"I know not exactly," replied Miss Johnson; "but I believe he hinted at your design of swearing your life against him."

"O, then," said the Countess, "it is not out of love for me, that he seeks a reconciliation, but from dread of exposure. Alas, Sarah! you little know—you cannot even imagine—what insults and wrongs I have had to endure from that man for the last four years. He keeps a mistress before my very eyes, by whom he has children. Were I, like her, a mother, then indeed, I might suffer and conceal my misery ; but now——"

Tears stopped her further utterance.

"I owe it to myself," she resumed at length, drying her eyes, "not to live any longer with Lord Ferrers. If he attempts to compel me, I shall bring my injuries before parliament."

"Pause, dear Lady, let me implore you," said Sarah, "before you take so irrevocable a step. My Lord may yet be brought to reason."

"Never!" said the Countess. "Mr. Johnson should know him better than for a moment to expect it. To be sure, Lord Ferrers is timid enough when any danger threatens him,

and specious enough in his promises when he wishes to be delivered from peril ; but his words come not from his heart. Why should I, who have proved his faithlessness, believe him ? No. I will go to my father with humility, tears, and confessions of my disobedience."

"Not yet, not yet, dear madam," said Sarah in tones of earnest intreaty ; for she, like her father, was a peace-maker. "Consider ! This is the first serious misunderstanding you have ever had with my Lord. Do not, therefore, refuse his request that you will grant him an opportunity to regain your esteem.

"And subject myself to fresh insult ?" added the Countess.

"Nay, dear Lady," rejoined Sarah. "You may be the means of entirely reclaiming him. Do not throw away so precious a chance."

"If I thought with you, I should be mad to neglect any opportunity calculated to promote his happiness and mine," said the Countess. "But my sufferings cry aloud for redress. It

is not his attempt upon my life that weighs most with me, though that was very terrible to a defenceless woman. My other wrongs are greater far!"

"Yes! Heaven knows they are," pursued Sarah, who imagined that Lady Ferrers alluded to her husband's mistress. "Still, even these may be remedied. My father intends, should your Ladyship consent to forget and forgive, to stipulate that Mrs. Clifford and her children be sent out of Leicestershire."

"It is not even this which constitutes my chief distress," said the Countess. "I can bear the presence of that woman in the neighbourhood, mortifying as it must be to *me*—a childless wife—to hear of her and her infants. But I cannot bear, and I *will not* bear, to have my honour and chastity impeached by base innuendos. Not to ~~resent~~ this, would be to compromise the dignity of my sex and station, and the pride of my descent."

"I am astounded!" exclaimed Sarah Johnson.

"Yes!" pursued Lady Ferrers. "My Lord is perpetually hinting against my honour in respect to Sir Thomas Stapleton, whom, God knows! I have not seen since my marriage. Then, not content with this, he dares to insinuate that——"

A violent panting, followed by hysterical sobs, again stopped the lady's speech. Quickly recovering herself, as if ashamed that any thing so unworthy should betray her into such emotion, she assumed a forced calmness, and, as her astonished auditor listened in breathless suspense exclaimed :

"He dares to insinuate that he might have won me without the formality of a wedding! There! Can your woman's heart plead any more for him?"

"No! no! Oh, no!" ejaculated Miss Johnson. "This is beyond my wildest conjecture."

"But even to this I would submit, had I any children. As it is, there is no link

between us—no common source of interest.
Oh, that I were a mother!"

Sarah's rhetoric was now exhausted. She had nothing further to urge. It was impossible to palliate the base and heartless conduct of Lord Ferrers towards his wife, whose bitter lamentation over her childless state, struck her companion with dumb pity.

"Oh, that I were a mother!" again ejaculated Lady Ferrers in tones of thrilling anguish.

The Countess and Sarah now bent their steps back towards the house. They had not proceeded far, before they saw a child—a little boy—running towards them with merry shouts, who, not turning aside for any impediment in his way, struggled through the thin hedges and leaped the ditches, making towards Lady Ferrers and Miss Johnson with a course as direct as that of a bird in its flight.

He soon reached the ladies, when throwing himself into Sarah's arms, he covered her face with kisses, saying, "Your papa has sent me

to see where you were, dear, dear Miss Johnson. Ah, you didn't come to dress me this morning, so I had a good cry. Why didn't you come? But I plagued Margery, rarely," he added with a mischievous flash of his eye. "I almost tore her things off, and wouldn't let her put on my clothes till Mr. Johnson came in."

"That was very naughty of you," said Sarah. "You know I don't approve of such tempers. I shall not take you to bed, nor get you up any more on a morning, if you do not behave better."

"O, don't say so, dear," exclaimed the little fellow, "and I promise to be a good boy in future—indeed, I will. So kiss and make it up, won't you?" he continued with tears in his eyes, and pressing his little lips to Sarah's face.

"There!" said Miss Johnson kissing him. "Now be sure you keep your word, and never let me see you in a passion again. Stand down, and run before us to the house. Ah!" she

added, "Look! here's Rover come to see after us."

"Rover!" echoed the boy, "Where?"

"Here," replied Sarah, pointing to a small terrier as it crouched closely to the skirts of her dress.

The boy broke a switch from the hedge; then with gestures ludicrously furious for so little a fellow, flew at the dog, and exclaiming, "Did I not tell you to stay in doors, sir, and be hanged to you?" gave him a smart blow over the face with the stick.

"Now, I am really angry," said Miss Johnson. "Give me the stick instantly, and go home. Is this the way you keep your promise? Mind that you do not venture to speak to me again to-day. You know I never will countenance cruelty, especially to dumb animals. Go. Leave me."

The boy did not venture to remonstrate, but went on his way, sobbing; while Miss Johnson, partly vexed, partly amused at the wayward caprices of the child, and glad moreover

of a subject by which she might haply divert the melancholy ruminations of her companion, said,

“Your Ladyship will hardly believe that the violence of that urchin towards poor Rover here, was all from jealousy at the dog’s sharing his task of seeking me.”

“He seems, indeed, to be a passionate little fellow,” said the Countess, listlessly.

“And yet,” pursued Miss Johnson, “he has a tender heart. With proper control, his temper may be made capable of all good. I love him dearly, and, poor child! he loves me.”

Lady Ferrers sighed. This was the love—the love of children—for which she yearned, but which was denied to her ardent hope. It has been already seen that the Countess was weak and fickle. Her early faith to Sir Thomas Stapleton had been easily overcome by the dazzling prospect of a coronet: she had set at nought the advice of her parent, and had married a man for whom she entertained scarcely the slightest regard. Still, vain and feeble as

her character might be, there was in her heart a well-spring of love as regards children. Here she was all sincerity. Oh, with what gushing tenderness would she have greeted the birth of an infant of her own ! But in this, the purest and holiest of all affections, she was doomed to "live a life forbid;" and her passionate love was smothered and beaten back upon its source.

Her curiosity respecting the boy was now slightly roused. "Is he a relation of yours?" asked she.

"No, my Lady," replied Sarah.

"Surely not a brat of Mrs. Clifford's?" said Lady Ferrers.

"We do not know Mrs. Clifford," answered Sarah proudly.

"Who is he then?" enquired the Countess.

"A poor orphan ! His mother perished in the earthquake in London, six years ago."

"How came he here?"

"My father took pity on his destitution, and has almost adopted him as his child."

"What is his name?" asked Lady Ferrers.

"Walter."

"What else?"

This last question embarrassed Miss Johnson excessively. She had been repeatedly cautioned by her father not to let the name of Bernard transpire in the neighbourhood. He had not, indeed, given her his reasons for this concealment; but as his wishes, whether explained or not, were laws to her, she could not be induced, under any circumstances, to disobey them. To utter a falsehood was, nevertheless, repugnant to her nature, and she, therefore, answered the enquiry by saying that she was not at liberty to mention his surname.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Countess, as a shade of suspicion crossed her brow. "His mother is dead, you say. How long has he been here?"

"Six years, my Lady," replied Sarah.

"Strange, that I should never have seen him before!" said the Countess.

"We do not let him go beyond the farm," rejoined Miss Johnson.

"What, not to school?"

"I am his only preceptress," answered Sarah.

"Does Lord Ferrers never see him?" enquired the Countess, with a scrutinizing glance at her companion.

"His Lordship seldom comes to the Lount," responded Miss Johnson, "and you know he never notices children."

"A child of mystery—eh?" pursued the Countess. "His story has roused my curiosity; let me see him again."

"Here, Walter," said Miss Johnson, calling the boy. "Come back."

The child with his eyes swimming in tears, and his lips smiling in gladness at being summoned by his dear and kind friend, sprang to the call, and, in a moment, was by Miss Johnson's side.

"Do you know this lady?" said she.

"No," replied Walter.

"It is the lady of Stanton Harold—Lady Ferrers," said Sarah.

The boy looked at the Countess—drew himself up proudly—then, advancing a step or two, made her a most courteous bow.

"A perfect gentleman, I protest," said Lady Ferrers, patting the little fellow on the head. "He does great credit to your breeding, Miss Johnson. Alas! What would I not give for such a child!" she added with a heavy sigh.

The party had now reached the house. Mr. Johnson was waiting anxiously to hear what effect the agency of his daughter had produced on Lady Ferrers. Making some excuse for drawing Sarah apart, he learned all that had transpired in her conversation with the Countess; and although there seemed from her account, to be but little hope that her Ladyship could be reconciled to her husband, he resolved, now that "the ice was broken," to try his own powers of persuasion.

Requesting an interview with the Lady, he so energetically represented the sorrow of

Lord Ferrers—demonstrated so clearly the effect which an exposure of the quarrel would have on the public mind, and, indeed, wrought with such power on her hopes and fears, that she consented to give up her proposed journey to Henbury, and agreed that Mr. Johnson should go to Stanton Harold, and bring Lord Ferrers to the Lount, where, and in the presence of the steward, the articles of peace were to be drawn up.

It was with an ill grace that Lord Ferrers came a suppliant for the forbearance of his wife. But the threat of an appeal to Parliament was all-powerful with him. Disguising his haughtiness, and suppressing his deplorable temper with ill-concealed effort, he submitted to the written conditions imposed on him, signed the paper, and then coldly withdrew to send the carriage to bring her Ladyship home.

Defeated, humiliated, mortified, the rage within him burned the more fiercely from

being forcibly suppressed. Woe to the first person who should cross him in his ire.

It so happened that, as he passed along the farm-yard, little Walter was busily engaged throwing grain among the chickens which were his especial pets. Lord Ferrers's groom was at a short distance holding the Earl's horse, and his Lordship, entirely abstracted by the painful lesson which had been read him, and meditating schemes of revenge, walked straight forward, not seeing the child, over whom he stumbled, prostrating the little fellow to the earth.

This trifling incident was enough to cause the fire of his rage to burst out into a flame. Without heeding the pain he had already caused the boy, he poured a volley of curses on his head, and lashed him furiously with his horsewhip. Walter uttered not one single cry ; but starting to his feet, seized a large stone, and threw it at his assailant's head, with such unerring aim, that Ferrers was, for a moment stunned.

Providing himself with another missile, Walter stood resolutely fixing his eye on the Earl, and determined if he struck him again to resent the outrage in the same fashion. At this juncture, the groom stepped forward, saying, "Put down the stone, my boy. Don't you know the gentleman? It is Lord Ferrers."

"I don't care," said Walter. "If he is twenty Lord Ferrerses, he shan't strike me—a coward! Yes, that's what he is, a coward!"

Sarah Johnson, who had seen what had passed from the window, now rushed forward, and dragged the pugnacious little fellow into the house.

Ferrers speedily recovered from the blow, which, had it not been dealt by so feeble a hand, might have felled him to the ground. He mounted his horse, wondering who the boy could be, and determining to flog him within an inch of his life, the very first time he should catch him alone.

"The urchin," ruminated he, as he rode

homewards, "has no doubt been tutored by Johnson to insult me. This will be another justification for my revenge. Johnson shall rue the day that he was born."

CHAPTER X.

A PENITENT—FOLLY OF SUICIDE—ONE CRIME BEGETS ANOTHER—
PERFIDY OF FERRERS—STRANGE ADVERTISEMENT—HOW FOXSTON
WAS DETECTED IN HIS LURKING-PLACE—HIS EXPULSION FROM THE
MANOR-HOUSE.

Silent he entered the abandoned room,
As ghostly forms may be conceived to come:
With sorrow-shrunken face, and hair upright,
He looked dismay, neglect, despair, affright!

CRABBE.

BUT where all this time—these six long years
—was the grief-stricken penitent, Foxston? Was his heart broken by the spasms of remorse? Had he been ejected from his dreary lodgings in the haunted Manor-House, and perished of cold and hunger in the streets? Or, had he, with desperate hand, killed himself as the only refuge from hopeless want and torturing thought?

No : nothing of this had befallen him. He still lived, and still dwelt in the grim old house. It has been seen that the first impulse of the wretch, on returning to his native country from the West-Indies, was to die by his own hands ; but that other and better thoughts had come over him, and he resolved to endure and murmur not--to suffer sickness, beggary, the scorn of men, and, worse than all, the displeasure of an offended God, rather than add the sin of suicide to the grievous offences which he had already perpetrated. In the miserable solitude of the day, and amid the searching terrors of the night, he had been mercifully taught to feel that "God will not despise a broken and a contrite heart." And so, with this trembling hope, he lived on from day to day in sufferings both of mind and body, waiting with a repentant spirit till the Almighty, in His own good time, should see fit to remove him, from this world of falsehood and temptation.

If the writer who feebly traces this history

could ever be tempted to cherish so wild a wish as to possess the genius of Dickens or Bulwer, or Ainsworth, and to be read in both hemispheres by the countless thousands who devour the works of those gifted men, it would be that his words, like theirs, might reach even the ears of the wretched, and that he might pour consolation into the hearts of such as meditate the folly and crime of suicide. He would remind the guilty of the all-embracing mercy that Omnipotence vouchsafes to prayer and penitence; while to the unfortunate—to those on whom the world has frowned, and who have felt in all its bitterness, the selfish cruelty of their fellow men—who have been smiled on and courted in prosperity and spurned in want,—and who have been oppressed in proportion to their helplessness—he would say, Sink not on the first coming of misfortune! The terror is more in the sudden change than in the thing itself. It is the unwonted aspect—the fearful contrast—the vile deformity—the strange ugliness—the hellish and menacing gestures of the witch, Ad-

versity, that scare your senses. Collect yourselves. Look the miserable and hateful thing steadily in the face. Defy it, and it will gradually become less terrible. The first shock being past, rouse yourselves and be stirring. Fate itself is impotent against the resolute endeavour of an honest spirit. Be not aghast at the direful ruminations of a sleepless night; but invoke the blessing of Providence and exert yourselves. Sleep will follow toil, and the nocturnal forebodings that affright you will cease. Quail not beneath the frowns and wicked daring of the man in power, who is only formidable when not resisted. Let not your hearts sicken and sink at the sneaking perfidy and desertion of friends. If you have been overreached by the schemes of a sordid plotter, show the mean creature that though he may injure, he cannot crush you. Invoke a stout heart; and, should you, in your need, have leisure amidst your strivings, pity the sordid and paltry motives of those who have wronged, and those who have deserted you.

But give not way to despair, and, above all,
think not of so damnable an act as suicide!

Even in the extreme and perilous case of Foxston, something of hope mingled with his fears of retribution. He groaned under “want, the curse of man”; he had no intercourse with his fellow creatures, and subsisted wholly on the casual bounty of those who were moved to pity by his forlorn and almost dying appearance in the streets. Still, though reduced to the condition of a mendicant—broken in health, and tortured by the throes of conscience—he lived on, and endured his daily-renewed agony with submission and penitence.

The ruin of this man may be chiefly attributed to the good fortune of his early life. He was born to independence. On becoming of age and master of the property inherited on the death of his father, he plunged into reckless dissipation, became a gambler, lost his possessions, and sank into the deplorable condition of a sharper at “hells”—a sort of decoy

to lure others to destruction. While pursuing these disgraceful practices, he became acquainted with Lord Ferrers one night at a gaming-house. Foxston was just the kind of man of whom the Earl had long been in search. Nothing could be more convenient to his Lordship than a person who thoroughly understood, and had no objection to practise, the fraudulent manœuvres by which the unsuspecting are cheated at cards, dice, and on the turf. Ferrers and Foxston, therefore, became very intimate: they drank hard in each other's company, and together plotted divers knaveries in which Foxston was the moving agent. No villainy came amiss to him: his recklessness was in proportion to his destitution.

But he found this degrading kind of life more tormenting even than the hunger and thirst he had previously endured. His proud spirit (for some remnant of his old feelings would occasionally burst forth) was compelled to submit to the wilful and wayward temper

of the Earl, to brook his insults and succumb to his threats. Foxston's disgraceful services were, moreover, not requited, as he had been taught to expect, with money; and his dependence on Ferrers became the more entire and irksome. He was galled by the yoke, but was forced to endure it.

At this period in our prodigal's life, he formed another acquaintance—an intimacy of a darker kind than that between him and the Earl; so fatally easy is the descent in vice. Penniless and starving, for his titled patron was out of town, Foxston was relieved, as he sat moodily in the tap-room of a low and thief-haunted pot-house, by a stranger of forbidding appearance, who, as the peer had done before him, soon recognized in the knowledge, address, and acquirements of the quondam Squire, qualities which might be turned to account in the swindling and thievish practises by which he (the stranger) gained, to use his own phrase, an honest living. Over this man, who turned out to be no other than our old ac-

quaintance Jem Gabel, Foxston after being some time subservient to him, gained an ascendancy, and became the leader in several desperate exploits, when the schemes of peaceful depreciation had been exhausted.

The connexion with Ferrers was nevertheless kept up; and it was not long before the Squire introduced Gabel to the Earl, who, not suspecting the fellow was a criminal of the deepest dye, took a great fancy to him.

From this period may be dated Foxston's decline in the favour of the Earl. Proud of being noticed by a Lord, and glad of an opportunity of making money without the necessity of perpetrating crimes which put him in danger of the gallows, (for Jem managed to get more by his connexion with Ferrers than Foxston could ever do),—the ruffian soon found his friend too much in the way, and accordingly did every thing in his power to prejudice the Earl against him. He was, moreover, jealous of the Squire's superior manners and attainments; and, to complete his dislike, was

dissatisfied with the division which Foxston had made of some booty resulting from one of their late deeds of midnight violence. "Honour among thieves," is an old saying, but the Newgate Calendar will show that it is seldom realized.

The Earl was not slow to encourage the manœuvres and representations of Gabel which had for their object the supplanting of Foxston in his esteem. He too had conceived a dislike to the Squire, whose bearing was occasionally loftier than the Earl could brook and who, when not excited by drink, was inconveniently scrupulous in forwarding the heartless schemes of his patron. These symptoms of returning conscience were frightful to Ferrers, and he feared that some day they might be followed by a confession of the nefarious practices he and Foxston had been concerned in together. Gabel's schemes were, therefore, fully countenanced. The plot ended in Foxston being induced to go to Jamaica under some lying promises on the part of Ferrers, who said that, backed by his influence, the unhappy man

would soon make his fortune in that colony. Knowing Foxston's propensity to dram-drinking, the Earl calculated that a residence of a month or two in Kingston would infallibly place his victim in the deadly fangs of the yellow fever.

Degraded as he was, Foxston lent a willing ear to the false representations of the peer, and left England to retrieve his finances in the West Indies, where he had no sooner arrived, then he discovered the detestable perfidy of his former patron. Ferrers knew well enough that his treachery would be manifest the very day Foxston should set his foot in Jamaica. But what cared he for that? The Squire would be in a land flowing with new rum which, not being difficult to obtain, he was sure he would drink morning, noon, and night. Should this fail of its almost uniform result, he felt, nevertheless, that his victim's utter poverty would keep him a prisoner for life in the West Indies. The Earl, therefore, comforted himself with the happy assurance that he had effectually destroyed his old dependent

and accomplice, and in a little time dismissed the matter finally from his mind.

The reader has seen how this notable contrivance was frustrated. The oppressor and the oppressed met once more ; but not as in former days. It was now Foxston's turn to triumph, at least, so far as to taunt his former master with every kind of reproach which meanness, perfidy, deceit and other varieties of moral turpitude could deserve. Writhing under his rebuke, the heartless and crafty scoundrel and trickster sought exemption from torture by a sudden retreat.

We have already said that as years passed over, and Ferrers heard no more of his victim after the unexpected interview in the old Manor-House, the Earl was again lulled into security as regarded him. But it was determined by Fate, as will be seen in the course of this narrative, that they should meet once more under circumstances more extraordinary than had ever characterised any of their former interviews.

During Foxston's wretched state of mendicancy after his return from Jamaica, and which lasted several years, he was one evening sitting and drying his rags before the tap-room fire of the little public-house in Paddington called, "The Wheatsheaf," when his gaze fell upon a number, eight or ten days old, of the London Evening Post, a newspaper of general circulation in that time. The advertisements were then scarcely a twentieth part as numerous as they are now, and were consequently more conspicuously displayed, and more certain to catch the eye. As Foxston pored listlessly over the contents of the journal, more with a view of eking out the time over his half pint of beer, and so ensuring the drying of his tatters previously to skulking for the night into the haunted Manor-House, than out of any curiosity to know the news of a world in which he had long ceased to take any interest, he was stricken with breathless amazement by the following advertisement, which he read over and over again.

“ If ROBERT FOXSTON, Esquire, late of Jermyn Street, St. James’s, in the City of Westminster and County of Middlesex, or his Heirs, Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, will apply at the Office of Messrs. Sleek and Claw, Attorneys, Gray’s Inn Square, He or They may hear of something to His or Their advantage.”

The unhappy man could hardly believe his eyes. What could it be that held out the prospect of advantage to him? Was it a trick of Ferrers to ascertain if he was still living? Or could any of his former offences against the law have come to light, and was this a snare to lure him to destruction? The more he pondered over the strange advertisement, the more he was mystified. At length, fixing upon his memory the names and address of the lawyers, he retired to his forlorn place of shelter, determining to give the matter consideration in the silence and solitude of the night.

He accordingly repaired to his den, where stretching his aching limbs on the straw couch,

he took counsel with himself as to whether he should answer the advertisement or not.

He had not been long employed in meditating on this to him all-important topic, when, contrary to the usual restless state of his nights, sleep stole on him, and his senses were indeed “steeped in forgetfulness.” No visions started out of the darkness to scare him. No withering recollections of his former life, made more horrible by the ghastly array in which dreams invest them, troubled his slumber. No words of despair rang in his ears as they had long done, night after night. He was not dismayed by any memory of the grisly legend which had condemned to ruin the once comfortable mansion wherein he lurked; nor did fear of detection under the shelter of that miserable roof, and consequent punishment as a rogue and vagabond, keep him in a state of half-wakefulness as it had often done. His rest was deep and oblivious! He was respite from pain of body, and agony of mind.

So profound and continuous was the unhappy man's sleep, that it extended to the noon of the following day, and might not even then have left him, had he not been roused by the gripe of a rough hand upon his shoulder. Startled thus forcibly and suddenly from such heavy repose, Foxston opened his eyes, and was almost blinded by the strong sunlight.

For a few moments, he could scarcely understand where he was. One or two not very gentle shakes from his assailant soon, however, brought him to his senses.

"Come, come," said the man, dragging Foxston from under his sack on to the ground, "turn out of this. What do you do here?"

Foxston gazed at his questioner, and perceived that he was in the hands of the parish beadle. At length then, he was detected in his habitual trespass, which, harmless as it might be in reality, could not, he knew, be tolerated by the law. As the crime of being without a home was thus clearly proved against him, it was of course not fit that he

should receive shelter under even a dilapidated and abandoned roof.

"D'ye hear?" resumed the beadle. "Don't I ask you what you do here? Give some account of yourself, my man, or I'll take you before his worship."

"I am a beggar!" answered Foxston.

"A beggar, eh?" rejoined the beadle. "Don't you know, my man, that begging's agen the law? What parish do you belong to?"

"I know not," replied Foxston.

"Here's a pretty go!" pursued the beadle. Not know your parish? Why, where was you born, my man?"

"I forget," said Foxston.

"Ahem!" ejaculated the Paddington functionary, seemingly in a brown study.

In truth the man in office began to perceive that should he detain his prisoner, the latter might throw himself for support on the overseers, in which case the beadle would be contriving for himself some very troublesome work in finding out where Foxston had a

settlement. He accordingly resolved to make a merit of expediency, and allow Foxston to walk off. It would never be known that he had found a vagrant lurking in the Manor-House ; his invasion of the premises having, indeed, no such discovery in contemplation. The fact is, that the beadle's valour had been excited by some little boys, who, having "made game of him," as the phrase is, had led him a dance that fine forenoon among the tomb-stones, when, finding the irate functionary close at their heels, they had leaped the garden-wall of the old mansion as Lord Ferrers had done on a former occasion, and thus a similar cause led to a second detection of Foxston in his lair. Fearing nothing from ghosts or fiends at twelve o'clock at noon, the resolute beadle managed, with no little exertion, to clamber over the wall in pursuit of the mischievous urchins ; but not being quick enough for his nimble little tormentors, he found no trace of the boys who by this time had scaled the further wall of the

garden and dispersed themselves in the meadows beyond.

The great parochial authority now stopped to regain his wind which he had panted almost away. Taking off his cocked-hat, and throwing his formidable cane on the ground; he pushed his wig a little back from his forehead, wiped his brow, sat himself under the shadow of one of the huge elms, and rewarded his virtue with a pinch of snuff. The sun meanwhile filled the atmosphere with gladness and splendour. So inspiring, indeed, was the weather, that could the parish dignitary have commanded, at that moment, a pot of the Wheatsheaf strong beer, he would have felt at peace with himself and with all the world, not even to the exclusion of the little boys who had led him so breathless a dance.

Strong beer was, however, not to be had without a retrograde movement to the hostel itself. This not being exactly convenient until he should have rested awhile from his fatigue, the beadle looked about him, and, for

once in his life become smitten with a love of the picturesque. Though the garden had run wild it was not without its charms. A few old, unpruned and shapeless rose-trees were in bloom : the neglected ground was golden with marygolds, which sowed themselves every year, and almost monopolized the beds : the trailing nasturtium, (propagated, like the mary-golds, by its own dissemination,) shewed its flame-coloured flowers in the borders : the gladiolus, whose bulbs had never been eradicated from the ground, shot up its sword-shaped leaves and hung, as if floating in air, its purple blossoms ; while the straggling honeysuckle spread out its meagre arms (unsightly for want of culture), and loaded the space with strong and yet faint odour.

Though living in a suburban, and, at that time rustic parish, all this was inexpressibly novel and delightful to the wearied beadle. If he could only find a convenient mode of entrance for a lady, who he thought could not very decorously surmount the wall, he resolved

to bring hither some glowing day the matron of the workhouse and be romantic for an hour. As it was, he culled a very comely nosegay for that gentlewoman.

Having satisfied his curiosity as regarded the grounds, the worthy functionary resolved next to inspect the house—that seat of mystery and terror, and wicked spirits ! He was not afraid, not he ; the merry sunshine, and the determination to record his exploit that evening among his friends at the Wheatsheaf so inspired him, that defying the devil and all his works, he boldly marched up to the broken windows, and looked into the very room where Foxston lay buried in slumber.

But who can depict the beadle's consternation when he descried in a remote corner of that deplorable apartment the Squire's figure stretched out and covered by a sack ! Though every thing within and without was bathed in light, our great man's heart palpitated with dread, and his first impulse was to rush out of the place, and alarm the constables and other

dignitaries of the parish. He, however, paused for a while, and something like confidence in himself returned. Ghosts and fiends were evidently out of the question at that time of day. The recumbent figure before him must either be one of those pestilent vermin, a houseless vagabond (touching whom all beadle^s are born, with an instinctive enmity), or a corpse, which, having been dug over night out of a grave in the adjoining church-yard, had been deposited in the ruined Manor-House to be taken away at convenience.

In either case, the detection of such an intruder in the old mansion, as a living vagrant, or a dead parishioner, would be a deed worthy of a beadle; and accordingly Simon Fidgen (such was the name of the Paddington functionary), determined to climb into the room and achieve an act calculated, according to one of his favorite phrases when his eloquence was excited, to *immortalize him for ever*.

Buttoning his coat across his manly chest to comfort the shivering which, even in that warm

weather, had seized him—grasping his cane heroically, and fixing his cocked hat well on his head with a resolute thump, Simon pushed up the crazy window-frame which he left wide open to secure a retreat, and, mounting the sill, boldly dropped into the room. Inspired with his own valour thus far, he advanced to the corner where Foxston lay, and, as we have seen, dragged him from his straw bed.

It has been said that the conversation which ensued opened Fidgen's eyes to the trouble which he, as a beadle, would have to undergo should he carry the forlorn man before the overseers, or his worship the magistrate.

"Well," said he, after a fit of generous rumination, "I'm a'most a-minded to let you go, my man; that is, supposing you'll promise never to come to bed here no more, you know. These here trespasses is agen all law; but then it's the duty of a Christian to forgive them as trespasses agen him; only it 'twon't do you, know, to try it on no more, for then we should be obligated to lock you up. How

should you like a night or two in the Round-House, eh my man ? I'm nat'rally of a soft heart ; so budge ! be off ! tramp ! stir your stumps ! mizzle ! Do you hear, my man ?”

Foxston heard plainly enough. He was now without a shelter. He had no place wherein he could rest his weary frame at night, unless indeed he chose to herd, four or five in a bed, in the filthy cellars of St. Giles's. To this the remnant of his proud spirit could not submit. His desolation was unmitigated.

“ Come, come, my man, no lingering here,” thundered the beadle. “ Be off, I tell you ! And mind you never let me see you here again no more !”

Ejected from his only place of refuge, rendered more dear to him from its contiguity to the grave of his sister and that of poor Judith, the miserable man passed into the busy world, wherein he had no resource—no hope !

CHAPTER XI.

SHOWING HOW FOXSTON WAS RECEIVED BY THE LAWYERS, AND
WHAT ENSUED THEREUPON.

The old Scythians
Painted blind Fortune's powerful hands with wings,
To show her gifts come swift and suddenly.

CHAPMAN.

Thou hast sold thy substance,
And time, worth all, in those damn'd shops of hell,
Those dicing-houses ; that stand never well,
But when they stand most ill : that four-squared sin
Has, at last, lodg'd thee in the beggar's inn.
A sort of ravens have hung upon thy sleeve,
And fed upon thee.

DEKKAR.

“ WHERE am I to sleep to-night ? or where
shall I ever rest again ? ” said Foxston to himself as he paced disconsolately along Church Street into the Edgware Road.

How often does it happen, when we think ourselves at the worst extremity, that Fate,

having exhausted its quivers against us, determines to reward our long suffering with some unexpected boon ! So it was in the present instance. The guilt, indeed, of Foxston was inexpiable ; but his penury might be alleviated ; and his mind, thus freed from wretched anxieties in obtaining wherewithal to assuage hunger and thirst, would be in a better frame to make peace with an offended Creator.

In the temporary oblivion of his woes caused by the preceding night's unaccustomed sleep, Foxston had also forgotten the advertisement which, at first, had so strongly aroused his curiosity. As this recurred to his memory, he resolved, come of it what may, that he would repair to the office of the lawyers, and declaring his name, demand the purpose of their public summons to him.

With this view, he walked across the fields to Gray's-Inn-Lane, and then striking towards Holborn, soon reached the Square where Messrs. Sleek and Claw transacted their legal affairs.

It was not long before he found the house containing their chambers; when, ascending a flight of stone steps, he arrived at the door of the dreaded office. With a palpitating heart, and a pale and bewildered visage, as if he had visited the Cave of Trophonius, or was preparing to pass into that awful place, he sounded the bell and brought to the entrance a dapper clerk who demanded his business.

"I wish to see Messrs. Sleek and Claw," said Foxston.

"You!" exclaimed the clerk, gazing with a mischievous grin at the rags of the mendicant who stood before him. "You wish to see Messrs. Sleek and Claw! Why what can you want with them?"

"I come by their own invitation," answered Foxston calmly.

"Come, that's a good un," returned the clerk. "Do you know, Mister, I rather like you for that. Their *invitation*, eh? Bravo! I wonder what next. But joking apart, Mister, these tricks won't do here. What do you

take us for? This is not the place for beggars. Away with you, or I'll hand you over to the Square-keeper."

And the trim young gentleman was just closing the door in Foxston's face, when the latter exclaimed in a peremptory tone,

"Hold, young man! Do you know anything of an advertisement in the London Evening Post addressed to one Robert Foxston?"

"To be sure," was the reply. "What have you to do with that, Mister?"

"I am the man," responded Foxston.

"Indeed!" muttered the clerk, looking at him incredulously. He then bade him walk in, and said he would mention the circumstance to Mr. Claw.

Foxston now entered a long narrow office, into which the dusty windows admitted but a faint light, a sort of hazy and dirty *demi-jour*. Behind a low, wooden screen, or dwarf partition, was a range of desks at which sundry clerks were engaged in making fair copies of "briefs" for counsel, or "cases" for opinion,

or engrossing “deeds” on sheets of parchment. Much as these intricate matters might be supposed to absorb the undivided attention of the writers, they nevertheless found time, by a few practical jokes among each other to abate the tedium of their occupation. One young gentleman having, between the finger and thumb of his left hand, rolled a piece of paper into a nice, hard pellet, shot the little missile with unerring dexterity at the nose of his fellow labourer sitting right over against him: another superfluously repeated to himself what he was copying, in order to embarrass the friend at his side, who was working equally hard at some totally different matter; while a third, having at the moment nothing to do, at once amused himself, and distracted the attention of his fellow-clerks by singing *sotto-voce* (though quite loud enough for his purpose) some snatches of Gaillard’s hunting song, “With early horn,” which Beard’s singing had made exceedingly popular in those days.

A notable device for increasing the general merriment was conceived by the dapper youth who had ushered Foxston into this region of law—this fatal place whence, with the most perfect unconcern on the part of those who prepared them, were constantly issuing letters, copies of writs, and other documents carrying dismay and ruin to the ill-starred persons to whom they were addressed. Taking from a corner of the office an old chair which was exceedingly rickety in all its limbs, and which moreover had lost one leg, the young wag offered it with mock-obsequiousness to Foxston, designing that it should fall from beneath him and prostrate the wretched man and his rags on the floor. This excellent jest, had it taken effect, would have entitled its projector to the grateful admiration of the entire office.

But Foxston saw through the scheme, and told the young clerk that he would rather stand than sit. Had the quondam Squire not been broken in spirit, and trembling with vague apprehen-

sions as to the purport of the advertisement, the dapper clerk would not have escaped so easily.

After waiting about ten minutes, Foxston was conducted into the penetralia where Messrs. Sleek and Claw were in the habit of presiding, each having a separate table covered with papers and standing in remote parts of the room. Mr. Sleek, however, was not within, and it was, therefore, to Mr. Claw that Foxston was introduced.

Scanning his visiter from head to foot, with evident surprise at his appearance, Mr. Claw motioned him to a seat.

" You come here, I believe," said the man of law, " in consequence of a recent advertisement in the London Evening Post."

" I do, sir," responded Foxston.

" Well, what have you to say?" enquired Mr. Claw.

" Simply," returned Foxston, " that I am the person to whom that advertisement is addressed."

"What!" exclaimed the lawyer, "can it be possible that *you* are Robert Foxston, *Esquire?*"

"Yes," replied he, "that was the style by which I was formerly addressed."

"You must make that appear," said Mr. Claw.

"For what reason?" asked Foxston, in a voice of trepidation.

"Nay," answered the lawyer; "it would be premature to tell you our reason before we have proof of your identity. And you must excuse me, if I say, that, judging from appearances, I do not think you are the person of whom we are in search."

The last two words struck ominously on the ear of Foxston, and he trembled.

"You seem agitated," said Mr. Claw. "It is not for me to imagine what private reasons you may have for disliking to be identified; but I may briefly tell you that our object in discovering the identical Robert Foxston Es-

quire whom we have advertised, is one which will ensure great benefit to that individual."

" You have stated," rejoined the forlorn man, " my christian and sur-names, and my last settled residence in London. It is not likely that there can be two persons to whom all those particulars can be equally applicable."

" Perhaps not," admitted the lawyer; " still you know even such things are within the scope of possibility; and we cannot, in matters of this kind, be too precise. You must surely have some means of demonstrating your identity."

" Alas!" returned Foxston. " None of my relations are living that I am aware of; and I have been so long out of the world that I know not what steps to take in such a matter."

" Where were you born?" demanded Mr. Claw.

" In Hampshire."

" What part of the county?"

"Near Andover. My father had a house not far from the town called The Shaw."

"You inherited that property?" asked the lawyer.

"I did."

"And made away with it?"

"Yes," answered Foxston with a groan; "I have been that worst of madmen, a gambler?"

"How long has your father been dead?"

"Fifteen years," replied Foxston.

"Had you any brothers and sisters?" pursued Mr. Claw.

"No brothers," Foxston answered; "and only one sister."

"What was her name?"

"Jane."

"Was she married?" pursued the lawyer.

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To a Mr. Hollis."

"Where did he live?"

"In St. Anne's, Soho."

"What was his christian name?"

"William."

"So far, your answers have been satisfactory," said Mr. Claw. "I may soon acquaint you with the motives of my close enquiry. You say you had only one sister, and that she married Mr. Hollis of St. Anne's, Soho. Is she still living?"

Foxston turned deadly pale, and heavy drops of perspiration burst out on his face. "I'll answer no more," he said in a faltering voice, "unless you declare your motives. I am almost mad with ill-health, poverty, and long-suffering. You see how you torture me. I'll stay no further questioning."

And, rising, he walked towards the door; but he had scarcely gone a pace or two, when he staggered and fell heavily to the floor as if suddenly stricken with epilepsy.

The noise of the fall drew several of the clerks to the room, one of whom was bidden by his master to go with all possible speed for a surgeon; and Mr. Sleek entering soon afterwards, and being amazed at the scene before him, was informed by Mr. Claw that the mendicant stretched on the floor was, indeed, no

other than the identical Robert Foxston Esquire of whom they had been so long in search. He added that the closeness of examination to which he had been subjected, had proved too much for him, and that he had even fainted under it.

Having given his partner the particulars of the inquiry, Mr. Claw convinced Mr. Sleek that they had lighted on the true man; on which the latter gentleman became exceedingly rejoiced, and, rubbing his hands together, exclaimed, "This is the best day's work we ever made, Claw."

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," observed Mr. Claw. "Suppose the man should die. He looks very ill!"

"Die!" echoed Mr. Sleek. "He mustn't die on any account. Of course, you've sent for medical assistance."

"To be sure," was the reply.

"I am afraid you were rough with him, Claw, in respect to his beggarly appearance."

"Not in the least, I assure you," returned the junior partner.

Any further conversation between the two lawyers was prevented by the arrival of the surgeon, who, on feeling his patient's pulse, soon removed all fear as to any probability that Foxston would die at that time. He was suffering, he said, from exhaustion and want of food.

Having pronounced this opinion, the surgeon next enquired into the circumstances that preceded the fainting fit; and when he heard that the unfortunate man had been excessively agitated at certain questions put to him by Mr. Claw, he recommended that, as soon as Foxston should come to himself, Mr. Claw should withdraw for a time, and that food should be provided for the sufferer.

"Didn't I tell you so, Claw?" said Mr. Sleek. "You have been too rough with him. Leave him to me. You can come in again by and by, you know."

"With all my heart," rejoined Mr. Claw.

"There's no use in asking advice without taking it."

And he withdrew for a time.

Mr. Sleek now ordered wine and other refreshments ; the surgeon applied himself to the recovery of his patient which was soon effected ; and the miserable man was amazed, on opening his eyes, to see himself attended with great solicitude by two strangers.

" You are much better now," said the surgeon addressing Foxston. " Take this glass of wine."

Foxston took the proffered refreshment ; and the medical man seeing that the amendment was complete, soon left his patient alone with Mr. Sleek.

" How do you feel now, my dear Sir ?" asked the lawyer.

Foxston was startled at the tone in which he was addressed. How many weary and painful years had passed since he had been spoken to with civility, much less respect ! He lifted his eyes to his companion's face : he was

sure he had never seen him before : all was mystery.

“Take another glass of wine, and a sandwich, my dear Sir,” continued Mr. Sleek. “I am sorry that my worthy friend and partner, Mr. Claw, should have discomposed you by his inquiries. A very excellent man is Claw, I assure you—very indeed. His heart’s in the right place, take my word for it ; but then he is apt to be a little rough in his manner. You must forgive him, my dear Sir. I hope you like that wine. If not, we’ll have another sort. What do you say ? It can be done in a moment.”

Foxston’s bewilderment increased.

“ You amaze me, Sir, beyond conception,” he exclaimed. “ What does all this mean ? this politeness to me—a beggar !”

“ A beggar, indeed !” echoed Mr. Sleek. “ No, no, my dear Sir. You are very far from that, I can tell you.”

“ Speak at once, then,” ejaculated Foxston. “ Put me out of this state of suspense and

giddy mystification. My brain cannot sustain it."

"Take another glass of wine, my dear Sir," returned the lawyer.

"No more wine," said Foxston. "I have drunk little else than water for many years. Wine distresses me. Tell me I beseech you the purport of this strange interview."

"Why," responded Mr. Sleek, with a smile, "I must not pester you with questions, as my rather indiscreet partner did; though, in good truth, Mr. Claw is a perfectly well-meaning man—he is indeed, my dear Sir."

"I have no doubt of it. But I am stronger now, and shall not shrink from any inquiry," rejoined Foxston with a sigh.

"Ah! I see you are still weak," observed the lawyer. "Suppose we meet again to-morrow, and resume the business after a good night's rest."

"To-morrow! A good night's rest!" echoed Foxston. "I must wander the streets to-

night. I have no home—no shelter—no money!"

"You are mistaken, my dear Sir," said Mr. Sleek. "You shall have as good a lodging as can be procured in London; and as to money —here!" he continued placing ten guineas in Foxston's hands.

"Am I in a dream? You astound and perplex me more and more!" exclaimed Foxston, staring at the gold which lay on his palm. "For the love of heaven, dispel the mystery at once, or I shall go wild."

"The mystery is nothing more nor less, my dear Sir, than that we have discovered you to be the possessor of very large property in lands and other effects," replied Mr. Sleek.

"You must be in some deplorable error," returned Foxston. "I sacrificed all I possessed—houses and lands—at the accursed gaming-table!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Sleek. "We'll see into that by and by. Our present busi-

ness, however, has no reference to any thing possessed at any time by you or your father or your father's father."

"You plague me with riddles," said Foxston,

"Can't help it, my dear Sir," observed the attorney. "The law of descent is in itself a riddle ; but, you see it is our business to solve it as well as we can. It was by us that the famous Kinsale-Barony affair was conducted."

Foxston scarcely heard a word of what was said, and looked abstractedly.

"Perhaps you don't recollect that most remarkable case," pursued Mr. Sleek. "I wonder you should not, seeing that it's only three or four years ago, and that it was, and is, much talked of. The matter is precisely this : Gerald de Courcy, the twenty-fourth Baron of Kinsale, being without issue, or relatives, that he knew of, in the male line—and the title appearing likely to die with him, employed us to investigate his genealogy, and we actually

traced a descendant of the eighteenth Baron, through his fourth son, in the person of a labourer in Plymouth Dock Yard, of the name of Courcy. This decline in circumstances, which at first sight seems very wonderful, is easily accounted for when one comes to think a little about it. Several centuries had elapsed since the ancestors of John Courcy (the personage I have alluded to) knew anything of their connection with the ancient Kinsale title. In so long a lapse of time, the posterity of younger sons of peers may be found paving the streets. Gerald, Lord Kinsale, is lately dead, and his lowly and distant kinsman, John Courcy, has this very year succeeded to the title and estates. Mr. Claw and I are rather proud of this affair, I assure you, my dear Sir. But pardon this digression," continued the lawyer, with a courtly bend of his body to Foxston. "Let us return to your own business. I dare say you never in all your life, heard of one Gabriel Whalesby, did you?"

"Never."

"I thought not. Nor of a lady of the name of Bidmead?"

"Bidmead!" echoed Foxston. "Let me see, Bidmead! Yes; I have a dim recollection of hearing my mother mention that name when I was a boy."

"To be sure," pursued Mr. Sleek. "Maude Bidmead was your mother's great grandmother."

"What then?"

"I'll show you," pursued the lawyer, taking a paper containing many folios from his table. "Now attend a moment. Your respected mother, Mrs. Foxston, was the daughter of Alice Brooke, who was the daughter of Bridget Douthwaite, who was the daughter of Maude Bidmead, whose maiden name was Whalesby. Maude was the daughter of Geoffrey and Jemima Whalesby; the said Jemima being possessed in her own right of an inheritance which, though of but little value when she married, has latterly increased in a prodig-

gious ratio. It is now worth more than double what it was when the last possessor, Gabriel Whalesby died, about sixteen years ago, and it was a famous property even then."

"Well!"

"Why, this Gabriel Whalesby died intestate, and without issue. No person of his name could be found. In his death, the family seemed to be extinct, and the possessions were in danger of being escheated, as we say, or, in other words, forfeited to the lord of the fee. Now, on accidentally hearing of the case, it occurred to me and Mr. Claw—a clever man is Claw—that it might be worth our while (you understand me, dear Sir) to do as we did in the Kinsale case, namely, to hunt back the inheritance, which we traced to Jemima, wife of Geoffrey Whalesby, who had issue, one son, Gilbert, and one daughter, Maude. In right of his mother, the property descended to Gilbert, and has continued in his line down to the late Gabriel. To be brief, my dear Sir, and not to puzzle you further, we

have discovered you to be the representative of Jemima Whalesby by transmission in the female line ; neither Maude Bidmead, Bridget Douthwaite, nor Alice Brooke, having borne any other than female children. You will observe, that as the property descended from Jemima Whalesby, the collateral relations of Geoffrey, her husband, are excluded, and you come in as son of Cecilia Foxston. But I fear I weary you. In one word then, you have only to establish your identity, of which, from what Mr. Claw tells me, I entertain not the least doubt, and we shall be able, with a little trouble, to put you in possession of a handsome revenue, leaving to you, my dear Sir, the appreciation of our services.”

“ In that, depend on it, I shall not be wanting,” said Foxston. “ But, alas ! I am so unused to hear of any thing but woe, that I can hardly trust myself with the belief of such extraordinary tidings as those which you now communicate to me.”

“ A little nervous, eh ? I don’t wonder at it,

my dear Sir," rejoined Mr. Sleek. "But it will soon pass away. Money is a powerful dispeller of grief, Mr. Foxston, and money will soon be yours. You will enjoy it a thousand times more, I'll be bound, than your predecessor, Gabriel Whalesby, who, between ourselves," and the lawyer assumed a very significant expression, "was a very sad fellow."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Foxston.

"Why, yes," returned Mr. Sleek. "Strange stories are told both of his life, and of his death. But I dare say there is a great deal of exaggeration. People always exaggerate, you know."

Foxston's curiosity was powerfully awakened. That he should succeed to the possessions of a person of doubtful reputation, was, for obvious reasons, a circumstance calculated to arouse in him emotions of intense and painful force.

"What was said of him?" he enquired.

"I'll tell you," replied the lawyer. "In the

first place, it is affirmed that he was a consummate knave who fattened his already well-gorged coffers by the plunder of widows and the ruin of orphans."

The words fell like molten lead into Foxston's heart, and almost stopped his respiration.

"Secondly," continued Mr. Sleek, without noticing the Squire's agitation, "he was suspected of being a murderer!"

Foxston's face now assumed a ghastly hue, and suffered horrible contortions. He uttered not a single word, and endured his torment without a groan.

"But guilty or not, he has passed to his final account. God help him!" ejaculated Mr. Sleek.

"Amen!" responded Foxston, sighing heavily.

"Among the other property of which you will come into possession," continued the lawyer, with a smile, "is an item that I dare say you will not very highly value—to wit, an

old, empty, dilapidated house which has the reputation of being haunted. In it, your predecessor died; and the good folks of the neighbourhood are afraid to go near it, on account of the ghosts and hellish noises which they aver may be seen and heard there. The credibility of people is incredible; and marvellous tales lose nothing by oral transmission. A good house is deserted and in ruins through the absurd superstition of the neighbours."

"Where is this house?" demanded Foxston, as a direful idea shot, like lightning, across his brain.

"In the parish of Paddington; not far from London," replied Mr. Sleek.

"What! the old Manor-House?"

"The same. You have heard something of the story, I perceive," said the lawyer.

"I have!" returned Foxston, gasping for breath. "Take back your gift," he vociferated, pacing the room with the gestures of a maniac. "Not for worlds would I touch it. It is poisoned—damned—hell is in it! Take back

your money, Sir. Let me go and die in my misery, rather than receive what has been wrung from tears and broken hearts."

"What do you mean, my dear Sir?" asked Mr. Sleek.

"I mean," replied the Squire, "that I would rather starve—rot—lie a stark and grinning corpse in the open streets, than riot in the possessions of forlorn and helpless children."

"I admire your spirit, my dear Sir," said Mr. Sleek in his blandest manner. "You are, however, mistaken; you will possess only what comes to you in right of your ancestress, Jemima Whalesby. The villainous acquisitions of Gabriel have been reclaimed since his death by the lawful inheritors. You have every right in what remains which equity can give you. Let me entreat you to be composed."

Foxston hid his face in his hands and remained for some time in perfect silence. At length, lifting his head, he spoke.

"Are you of opinion," he asked, "that, if upon investigation it should appear that this property is really vested in me, I shall be competent to bequeath it as I please?"

"Unquestionably, should you die without any heir of your body, lawfully begotten," replied the lawyer. "We have ascertained that Cecilia Foxston, your respected mother, had only two children, namely, yourself, and Jane, the late widow of Mr. Hollis. She was childless, and is dead. The right of inheritance, therefore, ceases with you."

"If then, you succeed," observed Foxston, "in establishing my claim to the property in question, my first care, after remunerating you to the full for your great services, shall be to get you to draw up such a will, as I shall dictate."

Mr. Sleek bowed.

"Let me now depart," said Foxston. "I am agitated, more than you can imagine by the events of this day. I will see you again to-morrow, and endeavour to produce the ne-

cessary attestations of my identity. It has occurred to me that my father's banker will prove me to be the person I represent myself."

"Nothing can be better," returned Mr. Sleek. "The more formal testimony, such as certificates of your mother's marriage, your birth and christening, &c., we can ourselves procure."

Having bidden the lawyer good evening, Foxston took his leave, more than ever ashamed, as he passed through the outer office, of his deplorable appearance. He now proceeded to Holywell Street, where he exchanged his rags for some decent clothes ; and then, taking possession of a furnished lodging for the week, he sat alone, ruminating on the strange events of his life. He thought of his follies and his crimes, and of their consequences: namely, the bitter scorn, perfidy and ingratitude of Lord Ferrers ; his own subsequent destitution, and terrified conscience ; his sufferings in the West Indies ; the danger into which he had plunged Hugh Bernard, and the ruin and death he had

brought on Judith. Here was more than enough to counterbalance his present good fortune.

The morning had seen him forcibly ejected by a parish menial from a house in which he had stealthily lurked for several years, little imagining it to be his own. From being an outcast and a mendicant, he had, by a marvellous concatenation of circumstances, become a man of large possessions. But in the midst of his good fortune, arose the torturing stings of remorse. Could he, if all was known, retain the property which had so unexpectedly descended to him?

“God grant,” exclaimed the miserable man to himself, “that I may die soon! die undetected! Hugh Bernard and Judith’s child shall then be established in affluence, free from the persecution of Lord Ferrers. Oh! would I could find them!”

CHAPTER XII.

STATE OF THINGS AT STANTON—THE BITER BIT—LORD FERRERS AND HIS FOOTMEN—QUARREL BETWEEN THE EARL AND HIS BROTHER—HOW CAPTAIN SHIRLEY AND HIS LADY LEFT STANTON IN A MIDNIGHT TEMPEST.

There is not in nature
A thing that makes a man so deformed, so beastly,
As doth intemperate anger.

WEBSTER.

Fly, Arden, fly ! avoid this fatal roof,
Where murder lurks, and certain death awaits thee
Wander—no matter where. Turn but from hence,
Thou cans't not miss thy way.

ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM.

THE reconciliation which had been brought about between Lord and Lady Ferrers by the beneficent agency of Mr. Johnson, proved, as has been anticipated, little more than a hollow

truce. Many of the conditions subscribed to by the Earl were not fulfilled. Mrs. Clifford, his Lordship's mistress, was not sent from the neighbourhood, but continued to live close at hand with her children. Nor did Ferrers scrupulously abstain, as he had promised, from any allusion to Sir Thomas Stapleton. Stanton, therefore, continued to be a miserable abode for the Countess; and the violent temper of her husband was perpetually breaking out into some fearful excess.

On one occasion, in particular, he returned from the Derby races in a fit of ungovernable frenzy at the losses he had there sustained; for, notwithstanding his deep plotting with Jem Gabel, and, in spite of his bribe to Dick the jockey, Meteor won the stakes. In this instance, the Earl's rage had something like an excuse: he had been gulled, bubbled, robbed, when he had expected only to cheat others. Surrounded as Dick was by his applauding patrons on the course, it was impossible that Ferrers could get at him to wreak his revenge; and

the confederate, Gabel, thought it prudent not to be seen within a hundred miles of Derby, so that the fury of Ferrers had nothing whereon to spend itself until his arrival at home.

But here it was destined to find a vent; for though he went to bed immediately on reaching Stanton, his malignant passions were not lulled by his night's rest, and he arose next day with the same tumultuous wrath burning still within him. Captain Washington Shirley and his lady were expected to dinner; and, as they seldom visited their relative, it was the wish of Lady Ferrers to receive them with every demonstration of hospitality. A banquet of more than usual luxury and ceremony was, therefore, ordered by her on the occasion. The Earl, though he expected his brother, knew nothing of the preparations for his reception.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, before Ferrers left his bed. During breakfast, he was attended, such was his pleasure, by three footmen.

As it was not often that any company was received at Stanton Harold, except visitors of a low and questionable character, the kitchen, on the day of which we write, presented a scene of unusual bustle. Being out of practice, the cook was in a state of as much flurry and excitement as the unfortunate *cuisinier* Vatel, when his master, the Prince de Condé expected the *Grand Monarque* at Chantilly. If the culinary inconveniences of the French *artiste* were great, the “professor” at Stanton had in like manner to encounter many crosses, and his embarrassment was extreme.

Just as he had surmounted his chief difficulty, he was “struck all of a heap,” to use his own phrase, on hearing a violent scuffle and outcry in the breakfast-parlour. This was succeeded by a rush down the stairs and the entrance into the kitchen of a footman writhing with pain and bellowing, that my Lord had cruelly horsewhipped him for nothing. In a minute another man came headlong down, followed by the tea-urn which the Earl had

pitched after him, and which, having felled him to the ground at the bottom of the steps, burst and discharged its boiling contents over his legs and feet. Starting up in agony, he limped into the kitchen, roaring out, “O, my feet, my feet! I shall never be able to walk again! Pull off my shoes and stockings, will you? Gently, ah! gently! I’m scalded to death! Ah! you’re peeling off my skin instead of the stocking. Oh, Lord! my feet, my feet!”

These words had hardly been uttered, when the third servant walked deliberately down the stairs, exclaiming,

“He’s not going to make me run! Blow for blow is my maxim. I told him so, and the cowardly villain never struck me, as he did both of you. And what was he in such a passion for? Why, because the barrel of oysters from London warn’t good, and I wouldn’t take a false oath that the carrier had changed them. He thinks I’ll leave his house directly; but I’ll do no such thing till I get my quarter’s wages which he wants to bilk me of,

as he did Robert the other day. I'll see him d—d, however, before I'll wait at table—a mean, blood-thirsty hound. He's no Englishman to run at me with a knife as he did, till I looked him steadily in the face and defied him."

The cook was aghast. It was of little use to exhaust his art in preparing a dinner if there were no servants to wait at table. Simon, whose shoulders still quivered with the stripe of the horse-whip, might indeed recover in time; but Gregory's feet were in such a state from the boiling water which had fallen on them, that it was plain he would be unfit for duty; and as to Joe, he had declared that the Earl should wait on himself before he would stir a single step into the dining-room. The glories of the culinary art would thus be obscured, for want of proper ceremony and attendance.

Captain Shirley and Mrs. Shirley arrived at Stanton about an hour after the above explosion of the Earl's rage. They were received with perfect cordiality by Lady Ferrers, but

with ill-concealed sulkiness by Ferrers himself, who withdrew into his own room and kept apart from his relations till the hour of dinner.

On this being announced, he stalked moodily by himself into the dining-room, where, on seeing only the butler and a groom in attendance, he enquired hastily where the footmen were ; and being told that one was scalded and unable to move, and that two others declared they would not enter his presence again, he flew into a fresh passion, and vowed that he would go into the kitchen and drag the three fellows up stairs by their hair. From this purpose, his Lordship was dissuaded by the intercession of the ladies, and the remonstrances of his brother, but more, perhaps, from dislike to again encountering the determined spirit of the man who had resisted his outrage in the breakfast parlour.

Submitting, therefore, for a time, and with an ill-grace to the rebellion among his footmen, he sat at dinner with taciturn ill-temper,

which was not a little increased by his witnessing the unusual sumptuousness of the repast.

“What the devil,” thought he to himself, “does Lady Ferrers mean by all this ceremony and all this expense on account of my brother? I am plagued at every turn, and degraded before my brother’s eyes by the insubordination of my servants. I wish, with all my heart, that Washington was in the flames, rather than here, putting me to absurd expenses, and prying into my family affairs.”

The Countess saw, by her Lord’s looks, that a violent explosion of temper was at hand, and did all that the most engaging sweetness of manner could effect to avert it. His sullenness, however, would not give way, and at length, after a most unsociable dinner, the two ladies retired to the drawing-room leaving Lord Ferrers and his brother over their wine.

“Something has discomposed you, Laurence,” said the Captain. “What is the matter?”

"Nothing that you have any concern in," replied Ferrers, sulkily.

"Perhaps not," rejoined Captain Shirley. "Still it is but natural that I should be anxious when I see you unhappy."

The Earl remained silent, as not noticing the observation.

"I am afraid," pursued the Captain, "that you suffer trifles to plague you. Recollect, Laurence, that it is the inalienable condition of humanity to be exposed to annoyances; and we then act wisely when we bear them with patience."

"Confound your preaching!" retorted Ferrers. "If you mean to imitate Selina, say so at once, and I shall walk out of the room and leave you by yourself. I detest, loathe and abominate the cursed cant of methodists. There's our brother Walter — one of your d—d Whitefieldian set — a pretty fellow he is, isn't he? Suspended by the Bishop of London for being a methodist! The Right Reverend Father couldn't have done much worse if he

had hanged him outright for treason to the Church. A Shirley suspended ! Think of that ! Then there's our precious aunt, Lady Fanny. But, however, that's not altogether so unnatural. A reformed rake makes the best saint, they say ; and, for the same reason, an old tough coquet that has outlived her beauty, is a ready-prepared heroine, in the conventicles, ripe for glory. Do you think if she was now as young and pretty as when Pope and Lord Chesterfield wrote amorous verses about her, she'd be angling for *souls*, to use her own phrase, as she is at present ? Not she ! Her hook would be baited for something more substantial. The only love she can get now, is to be found in the love-feasts of the Calvinists, where a few old women answer the purpose quite as well as any thing else. As for our cousin, Selina, she is a perfect nuisance, and ought to be abated. A pretty family this, of which I have the honour to be the head ! And to complete the drawling, bawling, hymn-singing set, I suppose

you, who, as a sailor, and ought to know better, are going to join them. It makes me sick to think of it. Pass the wine."

The captain did not attempt to stop the torrent of his brother's invective, but, when his Lordship had ceased, gently said,

" You demand for yourself liberty of opinion and conduct. Why then do you wish to restrain the same privilege in others ? "

" Liberty for myself !" echoed Ferrers. " To be sure. Am I not the head of my family ? Besides, when did you ever know *me* do any thing ridiculous—anything unbecoming a man of sense ? Am I a methodist ? "

" Certainly not," responded Captain Shirley. " I am no methodist myself. Still I do not, with you, believe that methodism includes all that is erroneous and absurd in human nature."

" The devil it don't !" returned the Earl. " I defy you, Washington, to specify anything more irrational."

"I think I *could* do so," observed the latter.

"Out with it, then!" exclaimed the Earl.
"To me, methodism is the crowning invention of human absurdity!"

"Why," observed the captain, "you, yourself afford examples of something more irrational than methodism. You let your temper get the better of you, and neglect the means which Providence has placed in your power of making those who surround you happy."

"This is rank preaching," returned Ferrers.
"I would advise you, Washington, to retire from the naval service, and study for the church. Perhaps you may get the ordination which Walter has forfeited."

"Laurence," rejoined Captain Shirley, "I little thought, in coming to see you, I should be received with taunts and insults. How have I merited it?"

"Who invited you? I did not," retorted the Earl.

"I came by the kind solicitation of Lady

Ferrers," answered the Captain. "As war has just broken out with France, it was her wish to see me before I went on active service."

"Lady Ferrers is vastly affectionate, and anxious, and hospitable, no doubt," rejoined Ferrers, with a sneer.

"This unbrotherly conduct does not amaze me, Laurence," said Captain Shirley. "You have been endeavouring, for some years, to alienate the love and respect of your family, and I grieve to say you have partly succeeded. Alas! that must be a perverse ingenuity which can extract pleasure from being disliked."

"What do you mean by that, Washington?" said Ferrers. "Disliked, indeed! My family had better mind what they are about, or by G— I'll give them some solid reason for disliking me. And let me warn you, Sir, against being insolent."

"Depend on it, Laurence," responded Captain Shirley, "I shall always say what my conscience dictates. You speak of giving your family some solid reason for disliking you.

You have done so already. Nay, restrain your impatience, and sit still, for you *shall* hear me. Are not your younger brothers and sisters under the unhappy constraint of suing for their fortunes? Do you not render the life of your Countess a miserable one? Do you not compromise the dignity of your rank by associating with persons of low station and worse character? And do you not injure your health, debase your understanding, and destroy your influence as a nobleman, by giving way to intoxication? O, my dear brother, think of these things. Regain the love and duty of us all, and give me no further occasion for this plain speaking."

" You are an infernal liar, and a scoundrel!" roared Ferrers. " You think, because Lady Ferrers has brought me no children, that the title will be yours, and that you may lecture me with impunity. But we'll see about that—we'll see about that!"

Foaming at the mouth with rage, he rushed out of the room, and shut himself up in his study. Here he remained,

walking to and fro in a frantic manner—gnashing his teeth—talking incoherently to himself—fulminating all manner of threats against his brother, and brandishing a large clasp knife in his hand which he usually carried about him.* While thus madly occupied, the night wore on. Still Ferrers remained secluded in his room, scarcely conscious of the darkness which surrounded him ; for so engrossed was he by the delirium of his fury, that he had neglected to ring for lights.

Captain Shirley was also much agitated ; but his was the natural agitation of a man who, loving his brother with heartfelt sincerity, was the more grieved at the manifestation he had just witnessed of that brother's violence and injustice. Hoping that the Earl would return in a calmer mood, he remained alone in the dining-room for a couple of hours, when, giving up all expectation of seeing him alone again that night, he repaired to the drawing-room,

* See Memoirs of the Life of Laurence, Earl Ferrers, 1760.

thinking it just possible that Ferrers had joined the ladies.

Not finding him there, the captain inquired of the butler if he knew where my Lord was, and being answered that he had locked himself in his study, and was there alone and in darkness, Washington recommended his lady, as it was near twelve o'clock, to retire to bed, determining on his own part to sit up and endeavour to see his brother before he slept. He had not calculated on so powerful an access of passion as it was now evident inflamed the Earl; and though stung by the inhospitable and unbrotherly conduct of Ferrers, Captain Shirley regretted that he had ventured so far in his expostulations. Come of it what may, he resolved that, if any effort of his could prevent it, he would not seek his pillow while any wrathful feelings existed between him and his brother.

With this commendable intention, and reluctant that his further presence in the drawing-room should be any restraint on the

Countess, who, as her sister-in-law had already done, might wish to seek her chamber, Captain Shirley returned to the dining-room, merely saying that he had some official papers to write to the lieutenant whom he had left in charge of his frigate, the Mermaid, then at Plymouth.

The clock on the mantel-shelf struck quarter after quarter, and still Ferrers did not appear. Captain Shirley left the door of the dining-room open in order that he might catch any movement above indicating that his brother had left the study ; but no sound was heard. To beguile the time, he opened the window which extended to the floor, and, stepping out into the air, took a few paces on the lawn. The night was remarkably hot ; not a breath of air was stirring ; but the sky was unusually clear, and the stars twinkled with a sharp and piercing brilliance. Just above the horizon, however, the captain discerned one or two small, black clouds, which he knew to be thunder clouds, and which, combined with the

closeness and stillness of the air, portended the coming-on of a thunder-storm.

Captain Shirley was even more skilled in meteorology than his brother, the peer ; for, independently of his nautical profession, he was a scientific astronomer, and, in after life, distinguished himself greatly by a series of profound observations, addressed to the Royal Society, on the transit of Venus over the sun on the sixth of June, 1761. On the present occasion, he was induced to believe that the threatened storm would be one of great danger; and he, therefore, thought no time was to be lost in seeking a reconciliation with his brother, before the uproar of the elements should make calm discussion scarcely practicable.

With this view, he summoned the Earl's servant, bade him go to his master, and say that Captain Shirley wished particularly to see him.

To his great astonishment, the man did not return, and the captain remained alone in a

state of much doubt and perplexity. Meanwhile, the portents of the approaching storm became more and more apparent. The firmament was overspread with clouds, which having, so to speak, taken their station, stood still, as if awaiting some command to pour forth their dreadful artillery. The winds were dead; while from the earth, which seemed mute with terror, not a sound proceeded.

By and by the black masses of vapour were torn by a flash of forked lightning, followed on the instant by one single burst of thunder which made the house quiver from base to roof. This was succeeded by more lightning, descending in a spiral form almost perpendicular to the horizon.

Captain Shirley walked about the room watching the progress of the tempest, and thinking of the moral storm which agitated his fiery brother. From the large windows he had an uninterrupted view of the

“ Most terrible and nimble stroke
Of quick, cross lightning,”

the flashes of which made the succeeding darkness more black and dismal.

The turbulence of the elements now increased fearfully. The lightning was no longer serpent-like and darting, but shewed itself in large sheets of fire, with scarcely an interval of darkness, wrapping in flame the family busts and pictures in the apartment. Seen by this pale and unearthly glare, the portraits of the grim old Shirleys, as represented either in marble or on canvas, (their line extending backwards beyond the Conquest) resembled so many midnight phantoms. In a little time, the wind, startled from its trance, arose, swelled into a hurricane, and drove with mighty force against the house, from which the solid masonry, as if in defiance, tossed it back towards the quarter whence it came. Returning to the contest, the mad gusts raved onwards, bringing with them a descent of fierce rain which smote the windows with such violence that every pane of glass seemed shivered by the assault. The limbs of the giant trees on

the lawn were twisted into strange contortions, and, with the roar of their million leaves, increased the tumult.

To the hardest and most unsusceptible mind, a storm such as this can hardly fail to be appalling. Captain Shirley, though as brave a man as ever lived—a sailor, moreover, and used to similar sights—could not behold and listen to the turmoil without emotion and something of fear for the safety of those surrounding him. His wife would doubtless be suffering from the terror of the time. He would go up stairs and endeavour to calm her fears.

As he was quitting the dining-room with this intention, the door was suddenly burst open, and the groom, whom he had sent to Lord Ferrers, entered pale with terror, exclaiming,

“For God’s sake, leave the house, Sir !
Leave it this instant !”

“What is the matter ?” eagerly demanded Captain Shirley.

"Oh, Sir! my Lord swears he will murder you before daylight," replied the man.

"You must be in some delusion, my good fellow," said Shirley, almost breathless with amazement.

"No, no, Sir," pursued the groom. "I never saw my Lord in such a state before. His threats are deadly, depend on it. Quick, Sir. Tell your lady to arise. I'll order your coachman. This is no house for you to sleep in."

"Where is his Lordship?" asked Captain Shirley.

"In the drawing-room," replied the groom.

"Is the Countess there?"

"Yes, Sir."

"I will go up to my brother immediately."

"No, no," exclaimed the servant with imploring looks. "Do not attempt it. For God's sake, Sir, do not. My Lord is armed, and will certainly commit some deadly act on you and on my Lady should you go near him."

“On the Countess !”

“Yes, Sir. He has already threatened her. Nothing but your absence will restore him to reason.”

“When did this dreadful outbreak begin ?” asked the Captain.

“Upon my taking him your message, Sir. My Lord was in his study when I went to him. On hearing what I had to say, he asked where my lady was. I replied that her ladyship was in the drawing-room. He then went there, ordering me to follow him, which I no sooner did, than he bade me load a brace of pistols with a brace of bullets each. My lady, at this, was ready to faint, but she did not dare to speak.”

“Did you load the pistols ?” inquired Captain Shirley.

“Lord bless you, Sir !” replied the groom, “My own life was in jeopardy; and I was forced to obey. But though I charged the weapons, I did not prime them. This precaution, how-

ever, was of no use. My Lord soon found out what I had left undone, and primed them himself. Then, returning the pistols to me, he said that if I did not immediately go down stairs, and shoot you, he would blow out my brains. I naturally hesitated at this horrid command, when his Lordship clapped one of the pistols to my breast, and actually snapped it ; but, God be praised ! it missed fire."

" But he had another loaded pistol. How did you escape ?" asked Captain Shirley.

" You shall hear, Sir," replied the man. " My Lady, seeing these dreadful doings, instantly fell on her knees, and, with tears in her eyes, begged and entreated his Lordship to calm his rage ; but, in return, he damned her, and, holding one of the pistols at her head, swore he would blow her brains out if she interrupted him. Meanwhile, I slipped down stairs, to warn you of your danger. My Lord will certainly kill you to-night, Sir, if you stay here."

"But where am I to go at this hour and in this tremendous storm? The horses will be wild with the thunder and lightning."

"Anything, Sir, is better than certain death here," replied the groom. "It is only two miles to Ashby. You will be there in a quarter of an hour, and somebody is stirring at all hours at the King's Head."

Captain Shirley now went up stairs to his lady, whom he found in bed, but not asleep, the tempest having kept her in a state of great alarm. What must have been her feelings, when summoned by her husband to arise and encounter the fury of the elements as a means of preservation from a worse danger within the house! The carriage and horses were soon ready, and the Captain and his lady "fled away into the storm."

CHAPTER XII.

FOXSTON REINSTATED IN THE MANOR-HOUSE OF PADDINGTON—THE ROOM OF THE SHADOW OPENED—WHAT WAS FOUND THERE—THE MANUSCRIPT—FOXSTON'S STRANGE DELUSION—HIS INEFFECTUAL SEARCH OF HUGH BERNARD—FOXSTON'S NOCTURNAL AGONIES—HIS MEETING WITH A STRANGER IN THE CHURCH-YARD—LADY BARBARA SHIRLEY.

That the attent consideration of some object in a solitary place, doth dispose some men to Ecstasie, that is, transport their thoughts beyond their ordinary limits, and doth raise strange affections in them, I know to be most true.

CASAUBON.

Methinkes I heare, methinkes I see,
Ghostes, goblins, fiendes : my phantasie
Presents a thousand ugly shapes.—
Dolefull outcries, fearful sightes,
My sad and dismal soul affrightes.

BURTON.

WE left Foxston in his new lodging ruminating on the extraordinary change likely to be brought about in his affairs through the dexterous instrumentality of Messrs. Sleek and

Claw, to whose office the still-unhappy man repaired on the following morning, when, after a further investigation, his claim to the Whalesby possessions seemed to be strengthened. In the course of a week or two, the production of baptismal registers and other documents, placed the case on so firm a footing, that little else than the preparation of the requisite deeds to establish his title to that which had so long been in abeyance, was required to put him in actual possession of the property of his ancestress.

When this was fully accomplished, he made over, out of the accumulation of monies due to the estate last held by Gabriel Whalesby, a large sum as recompense for the services of Messrs. Sleek and Claw, and forthwith took possession of the dilapidated Manor-House wherein, for several years, he had, as a wretched mendicant, found nightly rest, and refuge from rain and wind. To a mind such as his, in which every emotion of joy had been for ever crushed, the dismal and lonesome rooms of the old mansion were congenial, more especially

as the building was so near the graves of Mrs. Hollis and Judith. He would not have exchanged this melancholy retreat, although it was connected with dreary traditions, for the most cheerful spot of the universe, notwithstanding he was free to choose his habitation where he listed.

He accordingly put the house into tenantable repair; established his bed in the very room wherein Whalesby died, and, with gloomy pertinacity, not altogether unnatural in a grief-haunted penitent—determined on making **THE ROOM OF THE SHADOW** his place of meditation and penance.

This apartment, therefore, which for fifteen or sixteen years, had been shut up in darkness, was opened in Foxston's presence. On bursting the door, a flight of “leather-winged” bats, which had gained admittance there through the broken roof and ceiling, flitted against the faces of the intruders. This was a grisly sort of welcome to a chamber of mystery. The party, however, passed in, and, lifting the window-sash, unbolted and pushed open the

outer shutters, which immediately fell into the garden, the rusty hinges snapping by the sudden movement. The light of day was thus once more admitted to the room. Every object which met the eye looked dusky and solemn, though assuredly nothing was there which the last owner intended should inspire feelings of awe. It was the room of a libertine and a man of guilt ; and its contents, decayed by damp and neglect, were the more sad in proportion to the design which prompted their selection. The gorgeous paper, clothing the walls, was faded, blistered, and spotted with foul mildew ; the rich curtains of crimson damask dropped to pieces at the slightest touch ; and the wanton pictures were veiled by a surface compounded of dust and humidity. On a table, standing in the middle of the room, stood a decanter and glass ; and by their side, lay a volume of Lord Rochester's poems with the pages turned down on the table as left there by the hand of Whalesby who had probably been called away when reading it. The carpet, though once of the most costly kind,

was now rotten, and became full of holes as the footsteps of the intruders passed over it. All, even to the air, was damp, mouldy, heavy and sickening, though meant originally to minister to reckless luxury.

Close to the unhallowed volume on the table, Foxston saw a manuscript, the first few words of which so fixed his attention that he placed the papers in his pockets to be perused at leisure. He then ordered a pile of faggots to be kindled in the garden, and directed that every object left in the room should be removed and burned.

Having done this, and dismissed his attendants, Foxston betook himself to the perusal of the manuscript. How such a document happened to be left in the room—whether written in a moment of contrition by Whalesby himself—or deposited there by the terrible visitant of the wretch, was a mystery which Foxston could not solve; though in his present state of mind, prone to a belief in the marvellous, he entertained the latter idea. The facts disclosed by the papers were appalling.

Crime after crime—sordid, licentious, and cruel—had been perpetrated, until, at length, Whalesby murdered his elder brother that he might succeed to the inheritance; and the slaughtered man's broken-hearted widow died some months afterwards in child-bed. The infant so born, did not long survive. To this very woman and child, the tradition of the haunted Manor House referred ; and most probably it was through the crime here narrated that Foxston had eventually become possessed of the property. This fearful consideration inspired him with additional gloom.

In a few days, he caused the chamber to be lined with shelves which he stored with pious books ; and here he would sit absorbed in reading the works of Hooker, Barrow, the religious poems of Donne, and, above all, the sublime prose of Jeremy Taylor, till the fading light of evening rendered the page illegible. It was his custom then to saunter into the Church-yard, where he has often been seen by his few neighbours of Paddington Green

standing, with haggard face, and strange gesticulations, over the grave of his sister.

This unvaried course of life—this unrelieved solitude—these austere pursuits, added to the dreadful disclosures of the manuscript, and to a constant abstemiousness resembling the mortification of a Carthusian monk,—bred in the melancholy man strange delusions. When among the tombs, he fancied, as the darkness gathered over his head, that his sister—his ever kind and gentle sister—left her grave, and spoke to him in words of peace. Though night after night, he sought a renewal of this precious consolation, his heart was too thoroughly possessed by despair to be comforted. He was continually repeating to himself the solemn words of Donne,

“I have a sin of fear, that when I’ve spun
My last thread, *I shall perish on the shore!*”

Determined on a life of expiation—if expiation were indeed possible—the unhappy man rejected the neighbourly advances of those in the vicinity. He kept only one servant; and

although the many rooms of the old mansion were thoroughly repaired and furnished, confined himself to two only, namely his bed-room and study, to both of which, as has been seen, tradition, heightened by his own gloomy phantasies, had assigned supernatural visitants. The sounds of mirth, nay, even of cheerfulness, were discordant to his ears : to be solitary, pensive and repentant, were all he desired.

In addition to his many causes for lamentation, was his failure in tracing Hugh Bernard and the child of Judith. He had advertised the former, by name, in the London papers ; but no reply had been made to his eager wishes ; and Foxston concluded the young man was no longer among the living. This thought gave additional horror to his torment, of which he hoped some alleviation would accrue, could he find the youth and invest him with wealth.

In those days, the London journals did not, as now, find their way much into the provinces ; and Hugh Bernard, living in the country and

being utterly unknown except to his two friends at the Lount, never saw, nor was ever apprized of, the public summons addressed to him. The frustration of so pious a desire on the part of Foxston, seemed like a commencement on earth, of the punishment he feared he should suffer in another world.

His life, therefore, was one of unvarying wretchedness—of wretchedness beyond even the consolation held out to the repentant in the words of the great divines whose writings formed his constant study. His only intervals of peace were those during which, in moments of hallucination, he imagined he held communion with his dead sister at her grave, and heard her whisper hope. Cruel would any one have been who should attempt to argue him out of this insane belief.

But who can describe the torments he underwent on his lonely pillow? His first sleep, on seeking his nightly rest, was usually deep, though short; and it seemed only to give him strength to endure the unmitigated horrors

that were to follow. Waking up, after an hour's repose, every feeling of slumber entirely deserted him. The stings of conscience became fearfully acute : visions were seen, and sounds were heard, which scared him into frenzy. His midnights were thus hell-haunted. He seemed to pass into the regions of infernal flame, and to hear the shrieks, the dire clamours, the yelling petitions, the hopeless groans of the condemned. He saw the hideous torturers at their ferocious and loathsome work, and sickened as their savage laughter burst on his ears. From lakes of liquid fire, stretching out into space till the eye could no longer follow them, and in which millions of men and women floated in agony not to be assuaged, a sulphury exhalation arose scorching his eye-lids. Fiends, with threatening talons, flitted about him, and seemed as though they would have cast him into the blazing sea, but that a spirit, sad of aspect, though with something celestial in its appearance, and which bore the likeness of his sister, constantly interposed between him and the execrable tormentors.

These dreadful vigils commonly lasted till the faint, grey light of morning looked into the waking-dreamer's room, and brought with it the sounds attendant on rising day : of men renewing their labours in the adjacent fields—the short, crisp notes of birds—the gentle, whispering winds—the sheep bell, and the drowsy hum of the bee among the flowers beneath the window. Then, and not till then, was the miserable and exhausted man accustomed to sink again into the oblivion of sleep.

One evening when Foxston was keeping his accustomed vigil at the grave of his sister, he was startled by a voice close behind him which ejaculated in measured tones,

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted !”

Foxston turned hastily round, and was confronted by a strange-looking personage clad in a garb no less strange. He was tall and thin, pale of visage, and with a wild gleam in his eyes. His hair was cropped close, and he was clad from head to foot in garments of iron grey of the fashion of those worn in hospitals. In his

hand he held an open book which Foxston, even in the uncertain twilight, perceived to be a Bible.

"Blessed are they that mourn!" again ejaculated the stranger.

Foxston sighed deeply, but remained mute, as if desiring to hear more from one who had accosted him in so unwonted a manner.

"Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord!" pursued the man.

"Even so!" returned Foxston. "But the survivors—what shall be said to them?"

"Rejoice, rejoice! Behold I bring you glad tidings!" responded the stranger, still quoting sentences out of the sacred volume.

The singular manner of the man—his strange appearance—his evident piety, and his being, like Foxston, a night-wanderer among the graves, roused the latter's curiosity; and after exchanging a few more words with him, the Squire demanded who he was.

"A Bedlamite!" was the reply.

"How, then, came you here?" asked Foxston.

"Why," returned the man, "as they are pleased to consider me harmless, I am discharged as incurable."

"May Heaven pardon their brutality!" ejaculated Foxston.

"Amen!" responded the stranger. "But their exclusion of me is partly owing to myself. I am appointed from on high to preach the everlasting word; and even in the dismal walls of the mad-house, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, ay, and horrible blasphemy too, that curdles the blood only to hear it, I would not desist from the exercise of my calling. Could I see men perish, and not lift up my voice to save them?"

"And for this, they turned you out?"

"Yes;" returned the man. "But they had moreover a lurking suspicion that I am not insane—a suspicion which, as they had detained me many years, within their dreadful walls,

they now choose to mask under the term ‘incurable.’”

“Have you any friends?” asked Foxston.

“None on *earth*,” replied the stranger, with marked emphasis on the last syllable.

“No relations?”

“Not one! My wife and child lie buried in this church-yard. I am a solitary man, having nothing to keep me in heart but the great mission with which I am charged.”

“What is that?”

“The reclaiming men from sin,” replied the enthusiast.

“But,” pursued Foxston, “how will that provide for your needs?”

“He that doth the ravens feed, yea, providently caters for the sparrow,’ will sustain me,” returned the stranger.

“It will be so!” exclaimed Foxston, after musing for a while. “And I, unworthy as I am of so great a privilege, will be the dispenser of His gracious bounty. What is your name?”

“Gregory Skrymster.”

"Skrymster!" echoed Foxston, "I have a confused recollection of having heard that name before."

"It must then have been nearly ten years ago," said Gregory; "at which time my name was often in the mouths of men. Since then, I have been hidden from the world in Bedlam. I was forcibly dragged to that bewildering place soon after the earthquake in March 1750."

"Ah! now you speak of the famous earthquake," pursued Foxston, "I remember many things connected with your name. Can it be possible that you are the soldier-prophet?"

"I am he," replied the poor trooper. "The offence that condemned me to Bedlam, where I saw sights that, had I not been sustained by my mission, would have turned me more mad than they pretended me to be, was my prophesying a third earthquake to the utter destruction of London, and imploring my fellow-creatures to repent in time. Behold the folly, the injustice, the cruelty of men!"

"But your prophecy was erroneous," ob-

served Foxston. “The earth suffered no convulsion after the earthquake of March.”

“My prophecy was right!” exclaimed the trooper, throwing wild glances towards the newly-risen moon. “In wandering through the streets of London, and sounding my dreadful auguries in the ears of men, I was fulfilling a great commission. If Divine Justice was softened into mercy, and the hand of the Destroying Angel was stayed, accuse not my inspiration of error, but adore the infinite goodness of the Supreme, who doubtless found righteous men enough in our great metropolis to spare it even for their sake. Recollect the City of the Plain : ‘And the Lord said I will not destroy it for ten’s sake’.”

Foxston listened devoutly to the words of the enthusiast, who was just the kind of companion he needed—a teacher of piety, a son of misfortune, a lonely man. Roused by the present discourse from his accustomed delusion, and giving up, for that night, his watch over his sister’s grave, the unhappy Squire invited

Gregory into his dwelling, which, being thankfully accepted, the new companions repaired to the Manor-House, and were soon seated in the Study, where the very sight of so many theological works excited the rapturous admiration of Skrymster.

On being questioned, the poor itinerant admitted that since his ejection from the Hospital in Moor Fields early that morning, he had not tasted food, and that he knew not where to procure any, though he had no doubt he should find succour in good time. He had wandered in the twilight to Paddington church-yard, wherein he had been told during his confinement, his wife and child had been buried. But he could not trace their graves.

Having furnished him with food, Foxston next offered him a permanent asylum in the Manor-House, in which his wants should be daily supplied, leaving him at full liberty to imitate his great master, Whitefield, by preaching when and where he pleased.

At this generous proposal, the quondam

trooper heaped thanks and blessings on the friend whom Providence had so unexpectedly raised up; and then, falling on his knees, glorified the preserving goodness of the Almighty.

After a silence, during which the thoughts of both parties were too absorbed to permit of speech, Skrymster said,

“Did I not tell you, my inestimable friend, the reason why my prophecy was not fulfilled? Are not you yourself an evidence of the cause? Could a city containing you and a few more like you, be delivered up to destruction? The Searcher of hearts has preserved it, even that such as you might not suffer for the crimes of the wicked.”

Foxston shuddered, and groaned in intolerable anguish. The words struck against his heart like poisoned arrows.

“You have spoken,” pursued Skrymster, “of the day of the earthquake. On that morning, my friend, I saw what I shall never forget—a tragedy which led to an act of good-

ness on the part of a pious man—one like yourself—a man who not only reclaimed another from the commission of a deadly sin, but followed up his righteous deed, by rescuing the penitent from want.”

And here Gregory detailed the adventure in Tyburn Lane in which Lord Ferrers, Mr. Johnson, and Hugh Bernard had acted such conspicuous parts. He spoke also of Bernard’s wounded and dying sister, and eulogized, in glowing terms, the Christian conduct of the good steward.

Foxston could scarcely repress his emotion and impatience during the delivery of this narrative.

“Do you know anything *now* of that young man? Speak and bless my ears!” said he in a faltering and beseeching voice.

“Alas! no,” replied Skrymster. “On that very day, I was conveyed to Bedlam.”

“But you would recognize the hut in Tyburn Fields?” gasped Foxston.

“Yes.”

"It is not far off," pursued the Squire. "Let us go there now, even now. My happiness, perhaps my life, depends on what I may hear there."

And Foxston briefly stated, that in tracing Hugh Bernard, he was anxious to do an act of justice which he had formerly neglected.

"It is now midnight," said Gregory. "Our quest might be more effectual in the morning. The poor dwellers in that place are buried in sleep."

"You are right, my friend," said Foxston, with a sigh. "Would that I too could sleep! But what you have said will keep me restless till I have learned more. I know the Lord Ferrers of whom you speak; and I know him to be steeped in wickedness. I have heard too of his steward. Should we gain no information at the hut, I can apply to Mr. Johnson. How can I be grateful enough for the blessed chance by which I met with you this evening? You must never leave me; but be my friend, my counsellor, my comforter."

"Wonderful are the ways of the Creator!" ejaculated Skrymster. "You have alluded to the depravity of Lord Ferrers. Strange, that such a man should belong to a family which contains so many shining examples of godliness: his good brother Walter—his cousin, the ever-blessed Lady Huntingdon—his aunts, the pious Lady Fanny and Lady Barbara."

"Is not the last a maniac?" inquired Foxston.

"They have made her so, I fear," replied Gregory. "Her pious enthusiasm has caused them, with unhallowed and violent hands, to imprison her in a fearful receptacle of the insane. This much I overheard one of the tyrant-keepers in Bedlam say to his fellow. Outrages of this nature are the common themes of exulting talk in the chambers of that earthly hell. Poor woman! May the light of sanctity cheer her in the darkness of her persecution and agony."

"Amen!" responded Foxston.

"And shall I indeed live here, and read these books of eternal truth, and preach the word in peace? Unspeakable happiness!" exclaimed the enthusiast.

Foxston grasped his hand warmly. "This is your home," said he. "And now tell me, for we are both too much agitated to sleep, how you, a meek follower of Him who died for us, came to be a soldier."

"If you will listen to my story, it shall be briefly told," replied Gregory.

CHAPTER XIII.

HISTORY OF A RELIGIOUS ENTHUSIAST.*

But when fully persuaded that the devil was in them, which must be driven out by earnest, assiduous praying ; and that the expelling of an evil spirit, would be the bringing in of a blessed spirit, who would manifest himself by heavenly, soul-ravishing visions and revelations ; what might not this belief, this expectation, this *intention* of the mind, and obstinate assiduity, effect upon the most sound and sober ? And if once *ecstatic*, that is, out of their right wits, they needed no other enchantment for visions and revelations.

CASAUBON.

“ I was born,” said Gregory, “ in the neighbourhood of Taunton in Somersetshire. My parents were persons in the lowest class of life. My father was a ploughman—a hedger-and-

* Some of the circumstances and language of the following Narrative, are derived from the Autobiography of William Huntington who wrote S. S. (Sinner Saved) after his name ; the Memoirs of John Nelson, a soldier and field preacher ; and the Letters of an itinerant methodist parson of the name of de Courcy.

ditcher—a mower—a reaper—a swineherd—any thing, in short, in the way of humble labour by which a pittance could be procured to sustain life and thereby prolong toil. My mother also laboured in the fields, and was happy to be employed in hay-making, in weeding arable land, and in other agricultural work fit for women.

“ Poor souls ! there was little to cheer them in their pilgrimage through this world of trial. They had two children besides myself, the birth of each of whom was the advent of a separate woe ; for how was it to be sustained ? In proportion to the increase of mouths to be fed, was a decrease of means to feed them, inasmuch as my mother, by reason of her duty to the babe at her breast, was disqualified from earning any portion of the money necessary for subsistence. O, Sir ! dreadful are the sights which I have seen in our wretched hovel—a pale and starving mother wailing over her infant—children sleepless for want of food, and

a man sitting by their side with stony looks of despair !

“ I was the eldest of the brood ; and after striving in vain, during my boyhood, to mitigate the misery of home, I resolved as I grew towards man’s estate, that if I could not assist, I would no longer be a burden to my poor parents. A place of the most menial description in a neighbouring yeoman’s family being vacant at this time, I applied for it, and was engaged at twenty shillings a year, and my food and clothing. This sounded to me like an exhaustless fortune. My mind rioted in my good luck ; and plentiful food rendered me vain and presumptuous. I associated, in my few leisure hours, with youths of loose habits, and was given up to profane swearing and other transgressions ! So hardened indeed was my heart, that, after the first few months of my servitude had passed, I never visited the wretched hut of my parents, because the hunger, cold and almost nakedness, which I there witnessed, presented

too violent a contrast to my own sense of comfort. As I could not alleviate their misery, I determined not to be tortured by beholding it.

“ But this callous selfishness was soon destined to be punished: my heart was to be softened: I was to be reclaimed from vice, and called to righteousness, though dreadful was the summons, and intolerable were the burning pangs of my conversion. One morning, as I was commencing the duty of the day, news was brought to me that my father and mother, and their famine-stricken children had been seized, nearly all at once, with typhus fever. With the obstinacy of despair, the wretched parents concealed and bore their sufferings, until a neighbour, wondering why none of the family had been seen out of doors during several days, entered the hut, and discovered the ghastly truth. One of the children was dead; and the three survivors were huddled together almost in the last agonies. Of this dismal fact, the overseers of the parish were soon ap-

prized, and the poor creatures were removed to the work-house, where death speedily relieved them from the tribulation of this world. When all was over, and not till then, did I learn the miserable fate of my family.

“Such were the frightful means of my regeneration. I mourned over the loss of my parents and brothers, with a throbbing and bleeding heart. I accused myself of the most detestable cruelty in deserting them, and thought, with unavailing compunction and remorse, that I might have saved them. My iniquities stared me in the face like exulting furies of hell. I wandered about like a meagre, unlaid ghost, and imagined myself to be lost in a state of final reprobation. The fear of judgment struck upon my soul even as a flash of withering lightning would blast my eye-lids.

“These were my sensations on the day I heard the terrible news. I went to bed at my usual hour, but could not rest. The room seemed to be running round and round, and my soul fell so fast under the Divine wrath,

that I felt as though I sank a thousand fathoms in a minute. I arose in the dead of night, and attempted to pray. It was in vain. Words would not come to me in the tumult of my distraction. As the dawn came on, I recollect ed that my father had given me a bible, which I now found, covered with dust, on a shelf in the loft where I lay. I knelt down, opened the book, and read in it; but though I had heard that its precious words were a source of comfort to all who sought them, they were to *me* only messengers of grievous fear. Like unto the Scroll given to the prophet Ezekiel, the holy volume seemed to be written, within and without, with lamentations, and mourning, and woe. Where was I to turn for consolation? where seek a reprieve from my torture?

“ In this hopeless state, I was a fit prey for the Evil One, who whispered many black suggestions in my ear, and tempted me to blaspheme. Happily, I was furnished with strength to resist this diabolical solicitation, and, as the

hour for going to work had arrived, I went forth to my daily toil with swimming head and staggering legs, like a drunken man. As I passed the meadows, I gazed with envy on the cattle feeding there, exclaiming to myself, ‘They have no sin to answer for—no judgment-seat to appear before—no wrath from God to feel—no hell to fear! When they die, there is an end of them ; but eternity is our lot !’ A deep river lay before me ; and I was tempted to throw myself into it, as a refuge from the spasms of torment which my soul underwent. Like a crazy and helmless bark in a wild sea, I imagined myself to be floundering through the terrible valley of the Shadow of Death, all alone in the stagnant air and dreadful silence, and marvellously disfigured by my fear, hoping and yet dreading to make an end of my journey.

“This horrible state of mind begat a hope, that the Bible might be all a delusion ; that there was no Creator, and no day of doom to

come. I held debates with the Devil, and being always confuted by his specious sophistry, I surrendered myself to the profligate and impious meditations which he by degrees instilled into my mind. Nothing was too bad for me to conceive: no sin so hideous but I thought of attempting it. From this insane desperation, I drew a sort of reckless pleasure. I defied all punishment, and obstinately disbelieved that I should ever be called to account. In order more effectually to suppress all thoughts of futurity, I associated with drunkards, who, when I had no coin to pay for liquor, plied me with drink at their own cost.

“In this mad course, I continued for some weeks. At length, an acquaintance, who saw my frightful peril, brought me a sermon, and earnestly besought me to read it. I put the book into my pocket, and forthwith went to an ale-house, that I might drink and keep conscience down, for I felt I should have dreadful work if it ever got the advantage of me again.

This very fear, however, provoked my curiosity. With a sudden resolution, I snatched the sermon from my pocket: a quick impulse forced me to open it, and I stared at the page as a man would desperately read a warrant for his execution. The text of the discourse was a tremendous one. It was the denunciation against Pashur, the infidel priest, who audaciously smote Jeremiah the prophet: ‘For thus saith the Lord, Behold I will make thee a terror to thyself and to all thy friends !’

“The sermon was powerfully written. It was the preacher’s object to liken all unbelieving sinners, to the sacrilegious Pashur who, notwithstanding he was chief governor in the house of the Lord, rebelled against the prophecies of His chosen minister. To be a sinner now, when the light of the Gospel has been proclaimed, was, he affirmed, to be in the lost and woeful state of Pashur. ‘Behold, I will make thee a terror to thyself !’

“Panting, amazed and appalled, I read the discourse till I was well nigh mad. The hair

stood erect on my head, and I fancied I was already in hell. I went home, and read it again, and prayed. I laid the book under my pillow when I went to bed for fear the Devil should attempt to fetch me away in the night. What to do, I knew not. At length, I resolved to lay my case before some reverend man, and implore his ghostly counsel. With this view, I called on the clergyman of the parish; but, as he was not at home at the time, I went, impatient for relief, to the clerk, who, having heard what I had to say, took me to a pot-house, and drank at my expense (for I had received a few shillings from some visitors, who had one day dined with my master); he then told me, he was sure the clergyman would recommend my receiving the Sacrament, and promised that he would ‘put me up’ (such was irreverant expression) to the proper mode of his his behaving at the Communion table.

“I turned with loathing from this proposal, and knew not where to look for succour in my extremity. My spirits fell, my energies de-

serted me, my bodily strength waned ; and my master, pronouncing me unfit for service, turned me out of my place. He gave me, however, a character for honesty ; and, in a little time, I got employment at a gentleman's house, as assistant gardener, and was lodged in a room over the stables where the man, whose place I filled, had cut his throat. In his last moments, this unfortunate creature confessed that a fiend who stood in the corner had tempted him to the act. The stain of his blood was still visible on the boards.

“ It was in the bed of the suicide that I was now to sleep. Everything conspired to bring me to death and destruction. I was all day long tempted to do as this man had done. His temptations could not have been stronger than mine. My sins stood perpetually before my eyes : the Scriptures levelled their dreadful threatenings at me ; and I had a room to lie in where the Devil had gained his point over a fellow-sinner. I used to go to bed with as shuddering a reluctance as that with which an

ox goeth to the slaughter, being fearful that every night would be my last."

At this period of the narrative, Foxston groaned aloud. The memory of his own offences, and the sufferings they had entailed upon him, shaped themselves in awful array before him, and he was about to desire his companion to discontinue his story until a season more fitting than the present when they were surrounded by night and silence.

Gregory perceived the Squire's agitation, and resolved to pass on to that part of his life in which he was mercifully consoled.

"After enduring many sufferings worse than those I have detailed," resumed Skrymster, "I began gradually to think it was the intention of my Maker that I should not be a castaway, and I determined to go from church to church till I should find a minister, whose sermons pointed the way whereby a sinner could be saved. While engaged in this search, the friend I have already mentioned, lent me

a book written a hundred years ago by my countryman, the pious Richard Allein, a nonconformist divine. This opened my eyes, and I discerned at once what was true godliness. I vowed to perform the conditions of the Covenant therein recommended, and resolved to fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil. I determined to read the Scriptures in the manner John Bunyan prescribed to himself; namely, with ‘careful heart and watchful eye; to turn over every leaf with great fearfulness and with much diligence, mixed with trembling; and to consider every sentence with its natural force and latitude.’ I soon saw that all was good; and was thus comforted. My ignorance and blindness fell off like the cast skin of a snake, and I felt conscious of a new birth. I forthwith spake as the Spirit gave me utterance, and prayed with such energy, fluency, and eloquence, as quite astonished me. Sweet promises were poured into my heart. My sins, which had stood before me in ghastly and

formidable phalanx for so many months, now spread their loathsome wings and took flight.

"About this time, Mr. Whitefield came on one of his preaching expeditions to Somersetshire. I had the good fortune to hear him. Never shall I forget the effect his discourse had on me. Every word was burnt into my soul, and I think I could even now repeat his sermon syllable by syllable. I wept precious tears of joy: I was lifted above the earth: no tongue can describe the rapture of my exaltation. When the service was over, I waited on the preacher; told him what I had felt under his words; acquainted him with all my experiences, my sufferings, my struggles, my final conviction. I said that I longed to testify to the truth: that I felt irresistibly called to circulate the good tidings to the benighted part of my countrymen, and that I wished to consult him as to my fitness to become a preacher. After questioning me as to what I had experimentally felt, he

sanctioned my entering into the ministry, and I became an itinerant teacher of the word.

“Thus encouraged, I preached in different parts of the West of England. But I soon found that I had oppositions to encounter—mortifications to endure—bitter injuries and persecutions to sustain. I was reviled, treated with every variety of brutality, ridiculed, scorned. My confidence, however, in the righteousness of my cause upheld me, and I went on straight forward in my work.

“I recollect that one of the first places I visited, apart from my own immediate neighbourhood, was Wells. I was bent on preaching there, though, as it was a cathedral city, I expected to encounter violent opposition. But the written promise, ‘Fear not, for I am with thee !’ kept up my heart. A few lowly friends accompanied me. We had no sooner made our appearance in the streets, than the whole town was in a state of tumult. Reviling crowds pressed against us, and it was with much diffi-

culty that I could get a chair, as a sort of moveable pulpit, to stand on. Having offered up a prayer, and sung a hymn, I proceeded in my discourse, till the loud laughter and shouts of part of my congregation drowned my voice. Some brought out a table with liquor, and sang profane songs around it; others danced in ludicrous attitudes. One man blew a horn almost in my ear; and while I invited the inhabitants of Wells to drink freely of the water of life, a poor sinner came to me with a mug of ale in his hand, begging I would in return taste *his* liquor, which he swore was better and had more life in it than all the water in the world.

“In the midst of this commotion, and while I was scornfully hissed and buffeted, the Spirit made me as bold as a lion, so that I was able to bear an awful testimony against the scoffers who beset me, many of whom were nevertheless in a short time so far cut down by the word that their tongues were mute. I was, however, obliged to desist before my sermon was near

done ; for after I had preached three quarters of an hour, the congregation was so swelled by new comers, and the hooting and uproar was so stunning, that I had no choice but to conclude. I pitied the poor deluded creatures who persecuted me, and could have wept tears of blood for their precious souls.

“ In the villages, however, my ministry was more successful: the inhabitants of such simple places are more thirsty for the word. In a little hamlet not far from Wells, I preached one Sunday under a branching, venerable tree, to a very sweet, attentive congregation, though not numerous. We were assembled on an eminence commanding a woody landscape, green, smiling, sunny, and hushed in the Sabbath silence. Never shall I forget that day. During one of the pauses in the service, I gazed upwards into the blue wilderness of air, and saw for a moment, a vision more gracious, more wonderful, more amazing than my imagination could have conceived. I dare not attempt to describe it. Falling to the ground

in adoration, I remained a few minutes entranced, and, on resuming the worship, my congregation assisted me in making the hills and vales re-echo with praises. It was a blessed season. Many who heard me were much affected, and, after I had concluded, begged hard that I would visit them again. Years have now passed away; but O! how I should long to stand once more under that same tree!

“On pursuing my calling in other places, however, the infamous treatment was renewed. If this was disgraceful to the populace, the despotic conduct of several of the country magistrates, and of some of the clergy was more deplorable; for they, being men of education, should have known better than, under the colour of the law, to oppress and hunt down a harmless lover of his fellow-men. The vicar of my native village, in which I still continued to live, was enraged at my zeal; and the ale-house keepers, from whose tap-rooms I had reclaimed many a hard-working man, plotted

with this priest to have me pressed as a soldier. The tyrannical custom of pressing for the army was then as prevalent as the pressing of sailors has since been. I was accordingly seized and taken before certain commissioners of whom the vicar was one. Some few persons attended to speak in my behalf; but in vain. I was marched off to Taunton, and put into a dungeon, as a refractory recruit, where there was not even a stone to sit on.

“During this, my persecution, some men who had been my enemies, were suddenly converted to friends. I obtained also the sympathy of strangers, among whom an inhabitant of Taunton, though an enemy to the methodists, offered to give security for me, if I might be allowed to lie in a bed. Others brought me candles and meat and water, which they put through a hole in the door, and sang hymns outside my cell till a late hour in the night.

“Early the following morning, I was marched under a guard to another town. The men

who had been pressed at the same time, were ordered to the ale-house; but I was sent to prison. Lots were cast for me at the guard-house; and when it was settled what captain should have me, I was offered money, which I refused to take. For this, the serjeant was ordered to handcuff me; but though the manacles were not put on, I was kept three days in prison, where I preached to the poor reprobates among whom I was thrown. Heaven be praised, my endeavours were not without success! Ignorant as my fellow-captives were of all that is good, and abandoned to all that is evil, they listened with fear and trembling when I reproved them for their blasphemies.

“On the third day, a court martial was held, and I was guarded to it by a file of musketeers with their bayonets fixed. I was arraigned for being a methodist preacher and for refusing to take the bounty of enlistment. I plainly told my judges that I would not fight, because it was against the doctrine of peace which I was called on to proclaim. They laughed at this,

and again pressed the money on me, saying that if I ran away, I should be as liable to suffer the consequences as if I had taken it. I replied, ‘If I cannot be discharged lawfully, depend on it I will not run away; I am not a coward, though professedly a man of peace.’

“I was soon sent to quarters, where arms and accoutrements were brought to me, in which I was equipped. ‘Why,’ said I, ‘do you gird me with these trappings? I am averse to war, and, though I will not flinch from danger, neither will I fight except under the Great Captain of my salvation: the weapons He gives me are not carnal, like these.’ ‘You must bear them, nevertheless,’ said my persecutors. ‘It shall be then as a cross,’ I replied. ‘I will use them as far as I can without defiling my conscience, which I will not do for any man on earth.’

“When all this had ceased to excite ridicule from my comrades, I obtained their respect. I had as good opportunities in my red coat of exhorting and preaching as I could desire in

a black one. I reflected, with infinite comfort, that John Bunyan, and his teacher Gifford the anabaptist, had both been soldiers; and I improved the opportunity which had been forced upon me, by distributing among my comrades many printed tracts explaining and vindicating the tenets of the Methodists. I was indeed as effectually employed in the sacred cause to which I had devoted myself, as if I had been my own master.

"At last the cornet of my troop sent for me, and, with a horrible execration, swore he would have no preaching nor praying in the regiment. 'Then, sir,' said I, 'you ought to have no swearing nor cursing either, for surely I have as much right to pray and preach as you have to curse and swear.' Upon this, the young officer swore I should be flogged for insolence to my superior. 'Let God look to that!' was my reply. 'The cause is His; but if you do not leave off cursing and swearing, it will be worse with you than with me.' The cornet then ordered the corporal to put me into

prison ; and when the latter said he must not carry a man to prison unless he gave in his offence with him, the officer said it was for disobeying orders. To think that an ignorant, vain, wicked man should thus torment me, and I able to tie his head and heels together, caused a sore temptation to arise in me. But, when anger was coming on me like a flood, Providence lifted up a standard of forbearance, else I should have wrung my oppressor's neck, and set my foot upon him.

" After eight-and-forty hours' confinement, I was taken before the major, who asked me why I had been put in confinement. ' For warning people to flee from the wrath to come,' I replied ; ' and if that be a crime, I shall commit it again, unless you cut my tongue out ; for it is better to die than to disobey God.' The major told me, if that were all, I had committed no offence. ' You must make no mobs,' said he ; ' but when you have done your duty, you may preach as much as you like.' Then wishing that all men were like me, he dismissed me to quarters.

" Soon after this, I married as good and pious a woman as ever existed, and got permission to live out of barracks. It almost broke my heart to leave her and the child she had borne me, as I was obliged to do when the war broke out in Flanders. In the engagement with the French at Laffeldt, near Maestricht, I received a sabre-wound on the head which; to this hour, has produced a disastrous effect on my health and spirits. In faith and hope, I grow stronger and stronger every day; but the cheerfulness I enjoyed after my conversion, is gone. I am melancholy, anxious, and thoughtful, and see visions which make me tremble for others. It was in one of these, that I was bidden to go forth during the earthquake in 1750, and prophesy; an act which, as I have told you, led to my confinement as a maniac in Bedlam. While I was locked up there, my faithful wife was forbidden to see me. She died of a broken heart, and the child soon followed her. But we shall all meet again!"

These words were the conclusion of Gregory's story, to which Foxston listened with undivided attention.

Morning had now arrived ; and after partaking a slight meal, the Squire and poor Gregory went to Tyburn Fields, and inquired for Dorothy Tull. The people to whom they applied had never heard of such a person. So many alterations had taken place in the neighbourhood, that Skrymster could not trace the hut. At length, after a careful inquiry, the applicants heard that the poor old woman had been dead five years.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH HUGH BERNARD VISITS THE LOUNT—HIS RECEPTION THERE
—HOW HUMAN DELIGHTS ARE MINGLED WITH THEIR CONTRARIES
—HUGH'S NEPHEW—MISS JOHNSON'S BEAUTY—MUSIC IN A FARM-
HOUSE.

'Tis the angel's joy ; the Gods' delight ; man's bliss ;
'Tis all-in-all : without love, nothing is.

HEATH.

Ev'n Age itself is cheer'd with music ;
It wakes a glad remembrance of our youth,
Calls back past joys, and warms us unto transport.

ROWE.

ON the very morning that Foxston and Skrymster were searching in Tyburn Fields for some clue whereby to trace Hugh Bernard, the young man had arrived in London, after having, in his journey from Bath, visited the Lount. To go into Leicestershire on his route from Somerset to Middlesex was, to be sure,

travelling somewhat out of the way ; but the yearning of Hugh's heart to see Sarah Johnson —to ascertain if her affections were still disengaged, and, if so, to acquaint her with his long-cherished love, overcame all considerations of time and distance, and, as he had never before left his post in the Orange Grove library, he had no difficulty in procuring from Mr. Rowe the license of a week over and above the time requisite for transacting his business with the Reverend Mr. Spenser, the incumbent of Paddington.

This gentleman had formerly been curate of St. James's Church in Bath ; and had so distinguished himself by his piety and eloquence, that, in obedience to the unanimous request of his parishioners, he had printed a volume of his sermons, of which he sold the copyright to Mr. Rowe. That “ godliness is great gain,” was soon discovered by the bookseller, who sold edition after edition to his no small contentment ; and the principles of Mr. Spenser being strictly those of the church as by law

established, his writings were eagerly encouraged in the hope of their stemming in some degree the rush of methodistical doctrines which, at that time, threatened to bear down all before them.

After having won considerable clerical fame at Bath, Mr. Spenser had been preferred to the Rectorship, or, to speak more correctly, the perpetual curateship, (the Bishop of London being in fact the rector) of Paddington. At the period of our story, this excellent man had officiated several years as minister in this suburban parish, wherein he was as much respected as at Bath. The object of Hugh's journey to London was to treat with Mr. Spenser for a renewal of the copyright of such of his sermons as had been published by Mr. Rowe, the first term of which had just expired.

Mr. Rowe was now declining in years; and, having no children, had promised Hugh a share in his business. With this prospect before his

eyes, he resolved to make a journey to the Lount, and reveal to Sarah the secret of his heart. So many years having elapsed since his *rencontre* with Lord Ferrers, he hoped to escape any notice on the part of that nobleman.

It was on a serene and glowing afternoon in June that Bernard presented himself at Mr. Johnson's farm-house. The young man would not announce his name, but told the servant merely to say that a person from Bath wished to see her master. While waiting at the door, Hugh saw a female face looking at the window, as if to ascertain who the stranger might be. Could this be Sarah? Perhaps with the quick thought of a woman, she had guessed, on hearing the servant's message, that the visiter might be Hugh himself: perhaps her wish, suddenly roused by the announcement, had been "father to the thought." Be that as it may, the young man's heart palpitated as he caught a momentary sight of the fair spy, who

suddenly disappeared as if ashamed of having been detected in her stealthy scrutiny.

Scarcely a moment was suffered to elapse, before the maid-servant returned, and, bidding Bernard walk in, ushered him to a room where Mr. Johnson waited alone to receive him. Though the steward was much altered by age, Hugh felt assured it could be no other than he. But time had been busy with the young man no less than with the old, though its agency had produced contrary effects: the youth had grown into the prime of manhood, while the aged man was bent and enfeebled. They were strange to each other. Still Mr. Johnson looked well for one of his years.

“Do you not know me?” said Hugh, smiling at the perplexed looks of his host.

“What!” returned the steward, as the well-remembered voice struck his ear. “Eh? No. It can’t be. You’re surely not my old friend Bernard—Hugh Bernard!”

“But I am though,” answered the young man, seizing Mr. Johnson’s hand, and pressing it vigorously.

"God bless you, my boy," ejacuated the steward. "It warms my old heart to see you again. Zounds!" he added, as he drew his hand out of Hugh's grasp, "you've nearly crushed my fingers. Never mind. Stand off a bit, and let me look at you. Why what a fine, square, sturdy, handsome fellow you are. Well, and how did you leave my old crony, Rowe? Hearty, I've no doubt. And do you like your situation? Perfectly, I'll be bound. Don't answer me. I'll answer myself. I am overjoyed to see you, and won't hear you talk till Sarah comes in. Only mind you don't gripe her hand as you've done mine. Women are tender things. Sarah! Sarah!" he continued opening the door, and calling loud enough to be heard at the farthest end of the premises, "come into the parlour, my dear; here is Hugh Bernard come to see us."

There was a pause—a silent interval of expectation. Hugh Bernard could have counted the moments by the pulsation of his heart. The time had arrived when he was

once more to see her who had scarcely ever been absent from his thoughts. But the intensity of his feelings was almost too great: it was allied to pain; and he listened for her foot-fall along the passage, with something of fear. The crisis was at hand: he was soon to know if he must cease to hope, or if hope was to become certainty. He could scarcely sustain himself, and thought he should faint beneath the flutter of his heart.

But hark! that is her step. She comes. He will see her this very instant.

The door was pushed open, and, all unconscious of the agitation she had caused in the bosom of her visitor, Sarah entered the room. She stopped on a sudden almost in the doorway, as if she could not recognise her former acquaintance, who, on his part was so dazzled by the glorious vision he beheld, that he became incapable of movement, and did not advance to meet her. The young couple were fixed, each in his and her position, and seemed to be without speech.

“ Why, what in the name of Heaven is the matter with both of you, that you stand gaping at each other in that fashion ? ” said Mr. Johnson. “ Don’t you recollect our young friend, Sarah ? He is greatly altered, to be sure ; but I believe him to be still the same honest fellow he always was.” Then turning to Bernard, he added, “ As for you, who appear not to have a single word of greeting for a young lady, I shall arraign you at once as a traitor to the sex. Hold out your hand to him, Sarah ; you see he can’t speak.”

Miss Johnson did as she was bidden ; and Hugh, seizing the proffered blessing, stammered a few inarticulate words, and relinquished, with a faint and timorous pressure, the soft hand that had been presented to him.

The exquisite, perfect, and superb beauty of Miss Johnson, had, indeed, rendered Bernard despondent rather than elevated. Since he had seen her in her early youth, she had expanded into the finest of fine forms. The frankness of girlhood was gone, to be succeeded by the reserve

and caution of maturer years. But, Oh, what subduing charms—what infinite grace—what bewitching fascination, what melting beauty had the change brought with it! She was tall, but not thin or angular: on the contrary, her figure was marked by the full and round proportions happily characteristic of the female form. Her bust was the swelling throne of love; her tresses, black as jet, reposed with enviable luxury on her white throat and shoulders; and though above her forehead the hair was drawn upwards from its roots to a formal and preposterous elevation, still, so captivating was her loveliness, that even this absurd fashion of the day, was, with her, perfectly becoming. Her pouting lips, partly open with surprise, disclosed two rows of teeth which would shame the purest ivory; while from her dark eyes were poured such melting glances, that Hugh, having seen them once, could scarcely venture to gaze a second time at their soft, but dangerous lustre.

Though living entirely in the country, Miss Johnson was dressed in the prevailing mode of the day, namely a saque, flounced petticoat, tight sleeves with deep ruffles at the elbows, and a farthingale; though assuredly her lovely shape did not need the exaggeration produced by the last-mentioned article of feminine attire. Altogether, her appearance was seductive in the highest degree, and not the less so from the pure and unaffected innocence it expressed.

Could the possession of a creature of such transporting loveliness be within the scope of Hugh Bernard's ambition? It was impossible: so, at least, he thought; and the thought filled him with despair. He wished he had not ventured on so rash a step as to visit the Lount. He condemned as a vain illusion the hope which had inspired him, for entertaining which he deserved to be mortified. He would once more stifle his passion, and retreat without braving a danger which it was hopeless to surmount.

These reflections passed rapidly through his mind, and tied his tongue ; and the embarrassing silence might have continued some time longer, had not Mr. Johnson, bursting into laughter, exclaimed,

“ Are you a quaker, Hugh, and cannot speak till the spirit moves you ?”

“ The pleasure of again seeing the best friends I have in the world,” said the young man evasively, “ has been so perversely associated with the memory of my unhappiness at the time I was first succoured by them, that I have passed into a strange fit of abstraction. I plead guilty to your charge of rudeness, and heartily beg Miss Johnson’s pardon.”

“ Very well,” said the steward. “ You have with great propriety expressed your contrition. Now, Sarah, we are all attention to hear what *you* have to say.”

“ Simply, that I am very happy to see Mr. Bernard,” returned Sarah.

“ Brief and original !” pursued Mr. Johnson. “ So much for ceremony. You see your re-

ception, Hugh. Let us now think of more substantial matters. You must be hungry and thirsty after your ride. What will you have? But stop. Sarah understands these things better than we do. Go, my love," addressing his daughter, "and tell them to lay a tray, and bring it here. My young friend will then be able to stay his appetite till dinner."

Miss Johnson left the room on this errand, and, on her re-appearance was followed by a servant bearing a right hearty farm-house luncheon : videlicet, cold fowl, ham, cheese, a cucumber-salad, a jug of foaming ale, and a decanter of vigorous sherry. But the repast, though tempting enough to most travellers, had no attraction for Hugh Bernard ; and Mr. Johnson was not a little disappointed to find that he did not do justice to it.

" You don't eat, Hugh," said the steward. " Is there anything else in our country fare that you would prefer ? If so, it can be here in a minute. What do you say ?"

"Why, that nothing can be better than what is before me," answered Bernard.

"Prove your words, then," rejoined Mr. Johnson. "When I was a young man, I should soon have demolished the contents of that tray, and played a good part at dinner afterwards, especially if I had been riding much, as you have done to-day in the open air. Well, my boy," he continued, "and so you have got a holiday at last, and are come to see us. This is what I call kind in you. Sarah and I have often talked about you, havn't we, Sarah?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Miss Johnson; "and we have frequently had a third to take a share in our discourse, though Mr. Bernard seems to have forgotten him.

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Hugh, suddenly roused from his taciturnity, "my nephew! How could I have been a moment unmindful of him? Where is he?"

Miss Johnson, having again disappeared, soon returned, leading in little Walter, who,

probably as he had been bidden, marched straight up to his uncle, and offered him his cheek to kiss. This, however, was done with something of reserve and constraint. The appearance of the boy was, nevertheless, a relief to Hugh and Sarah. They had now a theme on which they could talk without embarrassment.

"He is grown a fine little fellow, I declare," said Bernard. "Do you know who I am, Walter?" continued he addressing the child.

"Yes," coldly replied the boy, retreating towards Miss Johnson.

"Fie, Walter!" said the young lady. "You do not behave prettily. Your uncle has travelled many miles to see you. Is this your welcome?"

"Why, didn't I kiss my uncle, as you told me, dear Miss Johnson?" replied the boy.

"I am a stranger to him," said Hugh, suppressing a sigh. "Children are naturally timid with those they don't know. We shall be on better terms in an hour."

"Yes, yes," observed Mr. Johnson. "We

must make every allowance for the shyness of children. In another day, he'll love his uncle as much as he now loves Sarah."

"No I shan't," muttered Walter.

"Why not?" asked Sarah.

"Because," answered the boy, "perhaps if I am in his way, when I am feeding my chickens, he may beat me, as Lord Ferrers did."

"What!" exclaimed Hugh Bernard, as the blood mounted into his cheeks, "can it be possible? Had Lord Ferrers the heart to strike his own—I mean could his Lordship so far forget himself as to beat that poor, helpless, unresisting child?"

"Yes, but I *did* resist," said Walter, "and smashed his forehead with a stone. And when I'm a man, I'll horsewhip him, as he horsewhipped me."

"Come, come, Walter," interrupted the steward, "let me hear no more of this. You know I've forbidden the subject. He's a spicy little fellow," he added aside to Hugh

Bernard; "but his heart is in the right place."

"How did it happen," asked Hugh under his breath, "that my Lord treated the child so brutally?"

"I forget all about it," replied Mr. Johnson. "'Twas something--nothing. Sarah can inform you, if it's worth the inquiry."

The fact, trifling as it was, which had thus come to light, plunged Bernard into a series of painful meditations. There seemed to be no end to persecution from Lord Ferrers. The same hand which had inflicted a death-wound on the mother, now maltreated the child in its tender infancy. His Lordship, it must be admitted, did not know Walter was his own son; but if he had so known, would that have secured for him a different treatment? This, at the best, was doubtful. In the gleam of happiness now before Bernard, stalked the dark figure of Ferrers, casting a gloom over the brightness. When was this diabolical influence to cease?

On being bidden by Miss Johnson to come to her, little Walter bounded with one spring into her arms, and kissed her again and again. “I have called you,” she said, “to tell you that your uncle is a very good uncle, and loves you dearly. If you do not treat him with fondness, and with gratitude for the affection he has bestowed on you, I shall not notice you any more, I assure you.”

“I feel certain he will do everything you wish, Miss Johnson,” said Hugh; “he and I will have a ramble in the fields to-morrow, and I’ll hold a wager we come home as good friends as can be desired.”

“There, Walter; you hear what your uncle says, and you know what I expect of you,” rejoined Sarah.

Dinner was now announced to Mr. Johnson’s great relief, for he was rather annoyed at the waywardness of the boy, and especially at what had fallen in respect to Lord Ferrers. Notwithstanding this, however, Hugh and Sarah, as they seated themselves at the table, felt more at ease than during the first hour after

the former had arrived at the Lount. In spite of all Mr. Johnson's endeavours to divert the subject, the talk constantly reverted to the child, regarding whom Sarah told so many anecdotes illustrative of the kind heart, but captious temper of Walter, that Hugh was deeply interested, and could not fail to recognise in the boy's character, an union of the mother's loving disposition, and the fiery arrogance of the father. The latter, he thought might, with proper discipline, be repressed.

When a few glasses of wine had been taken after dinner, Mr. Johnson, addressing Bernard, said, "I shall make no stranger of you, my young friend, nor depart from my invariable custom after dinner."

"If I thought you would do so on my account," rejoined Hugh, "I should certainly take my leave to-morrow, much as I long to pass a day or two with my dear friends of the Lount."

"Well said!" pursued Mr. Johnson. "Sarah will tell you, that she always sings me

a song or two between dinner and tea, as I take my ease in my arm chair. In this respect, I am something like the renowned Squire Western, only that I don't get drunk as Fielding's great man did, neither have I any exclusive love for the tunes of Old Sir Simon, or Bobbing Joan, though the former is a good, sturdy, English air, enough. Among friends," continued the old man, with a smile, "one may be allowed to praise oneself a little now and then; so I shall not scruple to say that I, unlike Squire Western, have the good taste to prefer Mr. Handel, havn't I, Sarah? I owe much gratitude to that noble genius. His music delights me; it inspires a waking dream of my youth, and excites, moreover, many ennobling associations. Were it not for listening to the productions of his muse, I should doze after my meal, and I think that is not good for me. Come, my dear, take another glass of wine, and go to the harpsichord. Play me, by way of overture, my favourite prelude out of Mr. Handel's lessons."

"But suppose Mr. Bernard is not fond of music," interposed Miss Johnson.

"True; I did not think of that," rejoined the old man. "This is the way with us all. We conclude that every one must like what we ourselves fancy—a mistake that has led to more estrangement among friends than might be supposed."

Mr. Johnson might have continued moralising till bed time, had not Hugh Bernard impatiently interrupted him by avowing his passionate admiration of music in general, and of Handel in particular, whose works he had often heard at the Bath rooms. This declaration, on his part, was highly gratifying to the steward, and Sarah accordingly took her place at the instrument.

The prelude she played is, perhaps, one of the most striking things in Handel's famous "*Suites de Pièces pour le Clavecin.*" It forms the introduction to the second volume of that work, presenting a happy union of the stately, the fairy-like, the grotesque, the capricious, and

the jovial. Its opening consists of a succession of majestic chords of the fullest harmony and grandest modulation, darting off, as by a sudden freak, into some rapid, tricksome and fantastic sounds, fit for the tumbling revels of imps at star-light. These are rebuked by a recurrence of the grave and pealing chords, which in their turn are defied by a sudden breaking in of the headlong notes, like moon-gleams quivering and dancing playfully on the solemn waves of ocean. Or, as there is so much of what is strange, and wild, and quaint, in the composition—so fit to be heard in such a magic spot as Shakspeare's Enchanted Island—the music might seem to shadow out the leading features of that wondrous tale. For example, when the stately chords suddenly interrupt the quick divisions in their flying gambols, our imagination may picture Prospero rebuking the frolics of Ariel ; who, impatient of restraint, again sings

“On the bat’s back I do fly,
After summer, merrily.”

This capricious part of the prelude is followed by (so to speak) a robust Allegro, in which

one might fancy Caliban revelling with Trinculo and Stephano over their liquor. Taken, altogether, this specimen of Handel's harpsichord music, to which Mr. Johnson frequently listened in charmed abstraction, is more poetical—more picturesque, if the word may be allowed—than any similar composition either of Sebastian Bach, or Domenico Scarlatti.

"Thank you, my love," said Mr. Johnson, when Sarah approached the termination of the Allegro. "Stop there. Don't play the Air and Variations, with which the composition concludes. Its tame formality is not worthy the inspiration of the rest. What do you think of that, Bernard? I'll be hanged if her master, Mr. Avison, could have played it better."

"You must not heed what my father says about my musical performance, Mr. Bernard," observed Miss Johnson, with a smile. "On this theme, he utters, I assure you, all manner of extravagances."

Though Hugh Bernard replied to this by

some common-place expression of delight (for to say truth, he was not happy in the minor graces of social life) he felt the enchantment in his heart's core. Of this accomplishment, on the part of Sarah, he was not aware in his former sojourn at the Lount. Perhaps, indeed, Miss Johnson was not at that time so great an adept in the art as she had since become under the masterly tuition of Mr. Avison, the then celebrated organist of Newcastle, from whom, during some of her visits to a relation living in that town, she had received many lessons.

If Hugh Bernard, who was indeed a genuine lover of music, was transported by the display of Sarah's touch on the harpsichord, how much more was he enchanted when he heard the rich tones of her voice—a contr'alto of uncommon sweetness! She sang some of the Shakspeare songs of Purcell and Arne; and so delighted was her father on hearing the rapturous encomiums of Bernard, that he became unreasonable in his requests, and though Sarah

had already exerted herself more than usual, begged her to indulge him with Handel's song, from Milton's *L'Allegro*,

“ Some time walking, not unseen,
By hedge-row elms, on hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate
Where the great sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames and amber light,
The clouds in thousand liveries dight ;
While the plowman near at hand
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.”

A delightful song for a country house. What do we not owe to the great Milton and Handel!

“ Blessings be with them, and eternal praise !”

With this, the musical recreation of the evening ceased. Much as Hugh Bernard had been captivated, the display seemed to offer another reason for his ceasing to hope that his love would be successful. So many charms and so many accomplishments united, must surely have a prouder destiny in view than any

which could be combined with him,—a man without relations or connexion, and whose birth was clouded by mystery.

Hugh's visit to the Lount occupied a week, during which he succeeded in making himself a great favourite with his little nephew, and was in daily conversation with the radiant mistress of his fate. Not a word, however, escaped him on the subject of his great secret, though Sarah, with a woman's tact, could not but suspect the state of his heart. At the termination of his allotted time, he left his friends, more than ever in love, and more than ever despairing as to its issue.

Mr. Johnson, however, made him promise that he would visit them again soon ; and having pledged himself that he would do so though he foresaw only a renewal of his sufferings, the young man started for London.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH GABEL IS SEEN WITH SOME NEW FRIENDS AT THE SPORTS—MAN'S RETREAT—MOLLY SKIPPER, PAGE THE HIGHWAYMAN, AND CAPTAIN LEWIS—A PLOT—MOLLY'S DEVOTION TO HER SWEETHEART—A HIGHWAYMAN'S LETTER—THE PEN AND THE PISTOL—A CA-ROUSE—HUGH BERNARD'S PERPLEXITY, AND THE DECISION HE FORMED.

To-night, soon as the church-clock strikes ten,
Come to my house.

LILLO.

THE village of Paddington, eighty years ago, was a quiet, removed, rural place, something in character resembling Willesden at present. It abounded in sequestered spots, open meadow-land, corn-fields, farm-houses, and straggling lanes bordered with turf, and overhung by the branches of hedge-row elms. Between the Uxbridge Road on the south, and the Harrow

Road on the north, stretched a woody and grassy avenue, called the Green Lane, extending from the north-eastern extremity of Bayswater to a little cluster of cottages, no longer in existence. At the corner of this lane, nearest to town, stood a rustic public house with a lofty, conical roof strangely disproportioned to the sub-structure. The building was backed by lofty elms skirting the lane, at the mouth of which stood a tall sign post, inviting the thirsty traveller by the pleasant name of "The Sportsman's Retreat."

A retreat, indeed, it seemed in every sense of the word, for nothing could be more lonely and secluded. Before the door stood a group of oaks, and a water-trough for horses; a long garden-wall extended southwards from the tenement, and the building was flanked by an out house, reaching about twelve feet above the ground, and lighted by three narrow windows placed just under the coping, so that no person from without could see what passed within. This excrescence of brick appeared to the few

passers-by like a wash-house, or place for brewing the beer sold at the tap ; but as the hostel itself was in fact a “retreat” for highwaymen, rather than for “sportsmen” the little wen-like structure was contrived for other purposes than washing or brewing, and was in more ways than one useful to the gentlemen of the road, and to thieves of an inferior grade, who kept up a good understanding with the landlord as they had done with his predecessor. An unlucky connivance with, or participation in, a highway robbery some few years previously, had dislodged the former tenant of the Sportsman’s Retreat.

The landlord of this hedge ale-house, was now indeed no other than our old acquaintance Jemmy Ram, who, having had certain misunderstandings with his creditors, and some awkward disputes with the excisemen during his occupation of the Cock and Thistle, found it convenient to leave London, and become the tenant of so lonely a tavern as the Sportsman’s Retreat. Mr.

Ram had some difficulty in obtaining a renewal of the forfeited license ; but his contrition was so well acted, and his promises of amendment apparently so sincere, that he at length succeeded. This house was Gabel's head-quarters whenever he was in the neighbourhood of the metropolis.

Having heard from the girl in Bath that Bernard was now in town, Gabel, whose life hung on a thread while Hugh existed, deliberated within himself how he could most securely compass the death of the young man. He had already been informed that Hugh would, of necessity, pay many visits to the Parsonage House of Paddington. The first plan, therefore, that suggested itself to the ruffian was to waylay his victim, and murder him in some by-place—a scheme, however, which the more he thought of it, seemed the more impracticable. Such a deed could hardly be perpetrated without noise and danger of detection ; besides, the month of June having now arrived, the days were long—the evenings light, and the pedestrians in the pleasant suburbs numerous.

Gabel being puzzled, was determined to call a council of trusty friends at the Sportsman's Retreat—to lay before them a statement of his difficulties, and crave their advice. With this view, he invited to the ale-house a famous highwayman of the name of Page—a man remarkable for hardihood, singular adventures, and more singular escapes from justice; and another knight of the road, one Paul Lewis who, having formerly been a lieutenant in the Navy, was distinguished by his associates with the name of Captain.

The last mentioned fellow was under very heavy obligations to Gabel, who managed to get him acquitted of his first capital offence. Lewis was a confirmed scoundrel from his early boyhood, and, on this account had been sent to sea by his father, a clergyman in Sussex. During his naval career, his courage at the capture of Senegal, at the destruction of the ships in Cancalle Bay, the reduction of Cherbourg, the battle of St. Cas, the siege of Guadalupe, and the engagement under Sir Edward Hawke, led to his promotion to the rank of

lieutenant. But, alas, for human nature ! bravery is not always allied to honesty ; and Lewis, soon after his warlike achievements, was mean and roguish enough, just as his ship was about to sail for the West Indies, to collect three guineas a piece from his brother officers, under pretence of laying in stores for the voyage, and then, absconding with his booty, commenced highwayman.

The place wherein he lurked was a low tavern in the Borough of Southwark, called the Welsh Trumpeter—a house which has been rendered famous in our days, by Mr. Ainsworth's admirable Romance of Jack Sheppard ; and here Paul became acquainted with Jem Gabel. One night, having stopped and robbed a gentleman and his son in a post chaise, not far from Kennington Common, Paul returned to the Welsh Trumpeter, and, being pursued, was apprehended and tried at Kingston. In this extremity, the address, experience, and cunning of Gabel, aided by the money of which he had cheated Lord Ferrers, succeeded in

bringing Lewis through his troubles. Plenty of witnesses were bought at five guineas a head, to swear that the accused had not, on the night charged in the indictment, been absent from the Welsh Trumpeter. The highwayman was accordingly acquitted.

Page and Lewis being summoned by Gabel, attended at the Sportsman's Retreat, where they took possession of the little parlour, and held debate over their grog. Gabel's statement of the case was very open and unreserved, and the confederates listened with becoming attention.

"This is an ugly sort of business, Jem," said Page. "The spot's too near town; and there's no real night, now. Couldn't you put it off a little later in the year?"

"Impossible," replied Gabel. "He'll be off to Bath soon."

"What do *you* say, Captain?" pursued Page, addressing Lewis.

"Why," replied Paul, "I'm ready to do anything in the world for Jem; but this job would

be sure to get us all scragged, and that would be of no use. It's no go, depend on't."

Gabel's own opinion was thus confirmed by competent authorities. He was out of heart, and cursed the provincial clumsiness of his Somersetshire friend Jack Dust, to which he attributed the almost incredible failure of the intended assassination in Avon Street. Still he would not altogether abandon his intention, and resolved, even if Page and Captain Lewis refused their aid, to prowl about the parson's house near Paddington Church-yard, and take advantage of any opportunity which chance might throw in his way.

In this perplexing condition of affairs, he was surprised one morning at the Sportsman's Retreat, by a visit from Molly Skipper, the girl with whom he had been intimate at Bath, and who, as has been seen, was formerly a servant in the house of Hugh's master. This young lady, being of a very loving disposition, had pined and fretted so much during Gabel's absence from her, that she determined to follow

him to London, and, to use her own words, “never to part no more.”

This unequivocal proof of her attachment was not very graciously received by Gabel; so far from it, indeed, that he d—d her for a fool, and threatened to turn her adrift,—a fate which she little anticipated, seeing that Jem’s attentions to her in Bath had been very earnest, and his protestations of love, especially when she supplied him with money, excessively flattering. On such occasions he had often told her, that he could not live without her. And indeed he spoke truth, though not exactly of that kind for which she received it.

As, however, Molly had brought with her to London a few guineas, carefully saved out of what she had been able to earn at Bath since he left her, the ruffian was a little propitiated; for to say truth, Jem’s exchequer was beginning to run rather low. His moiety of the five hundred pounds, of which, in conjunction with Dick the jockey, he had cheated Lord Ferrers, had been partly dissipated at gam-

bling-houses; nearly all the remainder had been spent in drunkenness, and, as we have said, in expenses to save the neck of his friend, Captain Lewis. Molly's fund, therefore, trifling as it was, became exceedingly welcome, and Gabel, on hearing her state the amount she had brought with her, changed the manner of his reception, and soon contrived to make the girl as happy and as pleased with herself and with him, as if he had at first received her with open arms.

As Molly knew all about the attempt on Bernard's life in Avon Street, and was aware that its failure had not only caused Gabel's sudden flight from Bath, but rendered any future visit on his part to that city, extremely inconvenient, to say the least, Jem confided to her the difficulty he was at present under in regard to making away with Bernard, and told her that his own life was not worth a toss-up while that young fellow breathed. This acutely excited the girl's sympathy for her sweetheart.

Molly's residence in Avon Street had taught her to look on bloodshed with perfect indifference; and, so true was she to the man of her choice, that she would have scrupled at nothing to ensure his comfort, much more his life. But how could she serve him in the present instance? If female assistance were desirable, she offered hers unconditionally, and without the slightest reserve.

After turning over the matter in every possible way, and becoming more hopeless the more she considered it, she suddenly exclaimed as a new thought struck her, "I have it! I can put you up to a way of doing for him as nice as possible!"

"Ah, Molly, I see you've a soft heart," said Gabel, "and won't turn your back on a man as loves you. How's it to be managed? Quick! Tell me, that's a good girl."

"Why, in the first place, you must take a furnished house for a week—I've got money enough," replied the wench.

"What then?"

"Decoy him there to be sure, and have a friend with you. You understand me."

"Nothing can be plainer," said Gabel
"But how are we to get him there? That's the puzzle. It's easy enough, you know, to ask a man to come and see you; but then people don't attend to such calls from strangers. Lord bless you, Molly, *he's* not the man to nibble at such a bait as that with the hook staring him in the face all the time. By what pretence could I get him into a out-of-the-way house? 'Twon't answer, Molly. We must try again."

"You ask for a pretence—I'll give you one," said the girl. "Young Bernard is a frank-hearted fellow. What's uppermost in his mind is sure to come out of his mouth. I've often heard him lament to Mr. Rowe that he didn't know who his father and mother was, and saying he'd travel to the furthest point of the earth to find out the secret. Couldn't you write him a letter, and promise to give him intelligence

about his parents? He'd swallow that bait, I know."

"That's worth thinking on, Molly," rejoined Gabel. "But where are we to direct to him?"

"Why," replied the girl, "I know where Mr. Rowe always puts up when he comes to London, and I don't doubt that young Bernard goes to the same house—the Bell Savage. I recollect the name, 'cause its such a queer one. Do you think we could find out where this Bell Savage is?"

"Nonsense!" replied Jem. "Every fool knows where the Bell Savage is. On Ludgate Hill, to be sure."

"Well, then, you give me a letter, and direct me how to find the place, and, if I learn that he's there, I'll leave it for him," said Molly.

"So far, so good," observed Gabel. "But the letter! How's that to be managed? I can do anything in life but write a letter. I don't understand the craft of a pen, and am nat'rally afeard of the sight of one. I've seen

afore now Justice Fielding settle a fellow's business all of a minute with one flourish of a goose-quill. D—n the pens! They was brought into the world for nothing but mischief; for what is it but mischief to make out mittimuses and warrants agen hard-working chaps?"

"But," resumed the girl, "if we can make use of 'em to get rid of that troublesome blade, Bernard, they'll be friends to us, at any rate."

"You can't write, can you, Molly?"

"No. Besides, we can't do nothing with a letter till we've got a house for the purpose."

"No more we can't," said Jem. "And now I think on't, there is a house to let close to the Church-yard, standing as convenient as may be, quite by itself in a paddock away from the main road. Put on your best things, Molly, and let you and I go and see about it."

Having been inducted by Mrs. Ram into a

room upstairs, Molly soon “cleaned herself,” as those young ladies, with an instinctive feeling of the fitness of words, designate their proceedings at the toilet. Arrayed in her smartest gown and bonnet, she and Jem bent their steps towards Paddington Green, and came within view of the desired house, in the windows of which, to their no small contentment, were seen papers denoting that the tenement was to be let.

The building in question was an old-fashioned farm-house, with a garden in front. This was separated from the little path leading to the north-western gate of the church-yard, by a paddock in which stood a barn and some hayricks. A narrow gravel-walk led to the house, passing by a large pond,

“——— full to the brim

Where cows may cool, and geese may swim.”

To the east, the building was flanked by the church-yard, and, on the west, was bounded by meadow-land. This habitation still stands, though the premises surrounding it are

strangely metamorphosed. It is now called Claremont House.

As Jem and Molly passed up the little gravel-walk, the pond was not unobserved by the former, who did not fail to appreciate the use to which it might be put in the execrable design so long meditated against Bernard. An inspection of the interior, confirmed Gabel's pre-possession in favour of the house, and having, by way of deposit, paid the first fortnight's rent, and referred to Mr. Ram the landlord of the Sportsman's Retreat, for a testimonial as to respectability, it was arranged that the applicants should take possession of the premises, which they engaged for a month.

One difficulty was thus surmounted. It was now necessary to prepare the letter to Bernard, and engage some trusty accomplices to aid in perpetrating the intended murder.

Page and Lewis were accordingly again summoned to a consultation at the hedge-ale-house, and as Gabel had a claim on both these worthies, who might need his assistance again,

(they knew not how soon,) a scheme was quickly devised, and, in a manner, rehearsed by the three. Molly, who felt sure Bernard had forgotten her, especially as he would never think of seeing her in London, was to act as servant to open the door, and conduct the young man into the room destined as the scene of his slaughter.

No part of the preliminaries remained unaccomplished but the preparation of the letter. This, however, sadly bothered the conclave. It has been seen that Jem could not write; Page could sign his own name, but nothing more; and Captain Lewis said it was so long since he had taken a pen in his hand, that he was sure he should make a bad business of it. He had, indeed, been sent to a grammar-school at a very early age; but he hated academical exercises, and could never be taught to spell—scarcely to write.

There was, however, no choice. If the captain did not write the letter, the plot must fall to the ground. At length, partly by coaxing,

and partly by threatening, Lewis, with many a groan, resigned himself to his task, when Jem, assisted by some hints from Molly, dictated the following letter, which after nearly an hour's application, was committed to paper in a sort of round-hand, and in the orthography peculiar to the penman.

mundee the 20th June 1757.

To mr. yew Burnurd

sur

this cums Hopping yu Har in gud Hellth, has i Ham at Present. has i Hav Heerd yu har in toun, i Begs To hinform yu has ow i Node yure farther and muther hin Regard Thay was Hold akkuaintans Off myn and wich i av Seen um Verri offn. as such, if yu wood lyk to no Sum peeticklers Cunsurning off um wich Wil bee Hewsful for yu to no, if yu wil Cal on me on wensdee Evenin nex at ten a klok at the farm Ous Klose to padintun chirch Yard, i Shal revile to yu The seakret Off yure Berth. from Yure umbel Survunt to Komand,

JOHN WINTERBOTTOM.

Had either Jem Gabel, or Captain Lewis been called upon to state the substance of the above by word of mouth, they would have expressed themselves far better. But the epistolary style betrayed them into sad^d confusion.

"It 'll do capital," said Jem Gabel, as the Captain read the letter; "and Molly shall take it to-day to the Bell Savage. Mind, my dear," added he addressing himself to the girl, "be sure you find out whether he is there or not afore you leave the letter, and don't on no account wait a minute after you've give it in. Just say it don't want no answer. I think I've got him now."

"And so shall I when we've secured the blade in the house, but not afore," remarked Page.

"Captain," said Gabel not noticing the highwayman's discouraging observation, "you've done me a very great service, and d—n me if ever I forget it."

"You're welcome to it Jem," replied Lewis; "only I hope you won't want me to do it again.

I'd sooner cut a throat any day than write three lines. My hand's ready to drop off now with holding that d—d sneaking little feathery quill. 'T'ant work fit for men. Women's fingers are made for pens and pins—a man's sinews can't tackle 'em. Now a pistol and a sword is another kind of thing. The very first time I handled a pistol, my palm took quite nat'r'al to the but-end. They seemed made for each other."

"Well said, Captain ! spoken like a brave man !" exclaimed Page.

"Paul's maxim is exactly mine," said Gabel. "I've just been a telling of Molly that I never could bear to look a pen in the face; and for that very reason, I'm the more obligated to the Captain for facing the difficulty. But talking's dry work, and writing's still drier. The Captain *must* want something after his exertion. What do you say to a bowl of old Ram's punch?"

The proposal was warmly received, and while Molly started on her errand, the triumvirate sat down to regale themselves with a

five shilling bowl. The concoction of this sample having been highly approved, an order was given for a repetition of the jorum, and this was followed by a third crown's worth, so that the party were in high glee.

"Come," said Page, "let us have a bit of a chaunt. We can all of us tip a stave. I'll begin. Here goes."

And accordingly the friends broke out into the following Trio, adapted to a tune as popular in those days as "Nix my dolly pals," is in ours; and rudely commemorative of several exploits of the singers.

PAGE.

The sun had gone down, and no moon was abroad,
As, riding from Hampstead, I lurked on the road;
When, the hill just beneath, and right in my teeth,
A carriage I spied driving hard for the heath.

With my tol,* and my pop,†

"Stop, stop!" I cried, "stop!"

"Be quick! Don't withhold

"Your watch and your gold."

* Sword.

† Pistol.

So, midst groaning and moaning, I took all the pelf,
Then set spurs to my horse, and took care of myself.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CHORUS.

So, midst groaning and moaning, he took all the pelf,
Then set spurs to his horse, and took care of himself.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CAPTAIN LEWIS.

Before an old beak* I was carried one day,
For shooting a clergyman on the highway ;
My mittimus signed, I was lugged out behind,
And locked in a stone cell to cool down my mind.

As my trial came slap,
I was 'feard o' the Crap !†
When who should be able
But honest Jem Gabel,
With trouble to bubble the Jury in Court ?
So off I got free, and we laughed at the sport.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CHORUS.

With trouble to bubble the Jury in Court,
So off he got free, and we laughed at the sport.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

* A Magistrate.

† The Gallows.

JEM GABEL.

If any man here a few guineas should lack,
 Let him do as I've done, and a crib* find to crack.
 With muffler† and jemmy‡ and skeleton key,
 In a night black as thunder when no one can't see,
 I've sacked all the plate
 For myself and my mate ;
 While, to end any strife,
 I've just tipped 'em my knife ;
 Made a dash at the cash with a resolute hand,
 For a house-breaker bold there is none can't withstand.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

CHORUS.

Then dash at the cash with a resolute hand,
 For a house-breaker bold there is none can't withstand.

Ha ! ha ! ha !

"Jem's a good-hearted fellow!" exclaimed the Captain, as Gabel concluded his part of the song, "I *will* say that for him. *He's* none of your selfish scamps as never takes care of nothing but number one."

* House.

† Crape mask.

‡ Crow bar.

As Lewis spoke, he emptied all the liquor remaining in the punch-bowl, into his own glass.

"Yes, yes," said Page. "Everybody knows Jem to be a tender-hearted chap. He's nobody's enemy but his own. Give us your fist, Jem. I respect you, if I don't, I'm —. Come, Captain, let us drink Jem's health."

"With all my soul!" answered Lewis, "Jem's a man after my own heart."

Upon the strength of this sentiment, and as no punch was left in which to drink Jem's health, thus warmly proposed and seconded, that worthy man was induced to order a fourth bowl, and under its inspiring influence, the friends became, if possible, more cordial and affectionate than ever.

When Molly returned, Gabel was delighted on her telling him that Bernard had, indeed, put up at the Bell Savage, and that the bar-maid had promised he should have the letter that very night.

With this cheering news, and after Molly

had tested the excellence of Mr. Ram's mixture, the friends separated, having arranged to meet again on Wednesday at the Sportsman's Retreat, and proceed together to the old farmhouse near the church-yard.

Hugh had that morning finished his negotiation with the Rev. Mr. Spenser, and intended to leave London for Bath on the following day. He had dined with the good clergyman, and did not return to his inn till some time after Molly had been there with the epistle, which was put into his hands on the moment of his arrival.

"A letter from Mr. Rowe," thought he; "what can it be about?"

But as he looked at the direction, the strange, uncouth writing, and the absence of any post-mark, convinced him that it could not be from his employer, and he stood scanning the direction, and puzzling himself in vain as to the writer, forgetting, so great was his surprise, that if he opened the letter he might solve the riddle at once.

This at length occurred to him, and, retiring to his room, he broke the seal and read what was written within. If his first surprise had been great, what was now his wonder and agitation, on seeing so remarkable a document! At first, he could not fully comprehend its meaning amidst the barbarous spelling, and confused style of the writing; but having perused it again and again, its purport became clear. A promise to satisfy the intense and yearning curiosity of his heart was held out to him: the mystery of his origin was to be explained.

But who could the writer be? Winterbottom! He had never before heard the name. Was it possible that the signature was a feigned one, and that the old woman of Avon Street, Bath, who had promised to take an opportunity of disclosing the secret, was in reality his correspondent? This idea took possession of his mind for some time, until at length he dismissed it as improbable. What could she be doing in a farm-house near London? And why should she adopt a false name? Then,

the jargon of the letter was not the jargon of Somersetshire. Could his parents (the friends of the intellectual Mrs. Hollis) have been on terms of intimacy with a man of such almost brutal ignorance as the writer of this letter? It was scarcely possible. The late hour of meeting too. This was suspicious. After deliberating with himself some time, he felt inclined to disregard the summons.

Still he could not shake the matter from his mind. Could he forgive himself if he neglected a chance, however unpromising, of ascertaining who were his parents? The burning desire to know this, returned upon him in all its irresistible strength. The letter, he thought, could hardly be a hoax, for he was utterly unknown in London, and, in other respects, was in too obscure a condition of life to render him obnoxious to such a trick. On the other hand, how could his visit to London have been known, the place of his sojourn traced, and the fact have transpired that a mystery hung over his birth? The whole affair was inscrutable.

By and by, it occurred to him that as the place to which he was summoned, was close to the residence of Mr. Spenser at Paddington, he would show the letter to that gentleman, and solicit his information and advice, by which he would regulate his own proceeding. On second thought, however, he abandoned this intention, as he felt he should be ashamed to acknowledge that he was a foundling, ignorant of his origin, which he believed was connected with disgrace.

The result of these self-communings was that he would wait two days longer in London, and attend on Wednesday night at the farmhouse. All doubts, apprehensions, suspicions, yielded before one insatiable impulse of curiosity. He would give his summoner a meeting, come of it what may.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHEWING HOW LORD FERRERS SUDDENLY LEFT STANTON HAROLD,
AND HOW HE WAS ROBBED IN HIS CARRIAGE ON THE ROAD BY A
SINGLE HIGHWAYMAN.

There is not a king, should you search the world round,
So blithe as the king of the road to be found;
His pistol's his sceptre, his saddle's his throne,
Whence he levies supplies, or enforces a loan.

Derry Down.

AINSWORTH.

THE quarrel of Lord Ferrers with his brother, and the flight of the latter with his wife in a midnight tempest, threw a gloom over Stanton Harold. The Countess now felt certain that the slightest hope of happiness with her husband could no longer be entertained, and she resolved that on any future act of his violence

she would delay no more, but throw herself on the protection of her father, and solicit relief from Parliament. She had already endured quite enough to warrant such an application.

Ferrers himself was tamed by the recent occurrence, and became quiet and reserved ; but it was the quiet of sulkiness. His lady could not induce him to talk ; nay, he would scarcely answer her questions ; but when he was at home, which was not often, paced up and down the rooms like a walking statue. Mr. Johnson could not procure an audience with my Lord even on important matters of business ; and Stanton, in its silence and solitude, became a sort of monastery of La Trappe.

It was manifest that this state of things could not long continue. The Earl was not only dissatisfied with himself, but with every body about him, unless indeed, Mrs. Clifford might be an exception. This was strongly suspected by Lady Ferrers, who could only account for her husband's frequent and long

absence from home, by the supposition that his time was occupied in visits to this woman. This idea gave her an additional motive for resolving to seize the first opportunity for delivering herself from such wretched thraldom.

But if the old mansion was intolerably irksome to the Countess, it was no less so to Lord Ferrers, in whose moody fits, an idea arose that something fatal was destined to occur to him in that house. His imagination was not able to embody this presentiment in any definite shape ; but the foreboding was not, on that account, the less oppressive. On the contrary, the more he brooded over it, the more formidable it became ; until at length so thoroughly did it take possession of his mind, that he determined to change the scene, and remove to London, where he could attend in his place in the House of Peers—see his lawyer on the subject of impeaching a family settlement, under which he had long acquiesced, but which, for some time he intended to destroy, unjust as such a measure would be to his brothers—

and, moreover, enjoy the riotous pleasures of the metropolis.

The design of going to London, when once formed, was speedily communicated to the Countess, who rejoiced at the prospect of leaving Stanton, and of once more seeing her friends. She longed to visit Marble-Hill at Twickenham, where she could confide her griefs to, and solicit the counsel of, Lady Suffolk. Ferrers was in such haste to accomplish his intention, that, on the day he first conceived it, which was the very Monday when the plot against poor Hugh Bernard was concocted at the Sportsman's Retreat, he desired Lady Ferrers to prepare for the journey on the morrow.

Among other feelings which actuated him in his temporary removal from the gloom of Stanton, was a hope that he should hear, on his arrival in town, that Bernard had fallen under the hand of Gabel; his Lordship, however, determined, as some drawback from the loss he had sustained through the ruffian's instrumentality, not to pay him the promised reward,

even should Gabel have the effrontery to demand it.

Early, therefore, on the Tuesday morning, the carriage was drawn up at the door, and Ferrers and his lady started on the road to London. The journey was passed for the most part in silence, to which, however, Lady Ferrers was, by this time so thoroughly accustomed, that it not only ceased to affect her, but afforded matter for self-congratulation, since it left her more at liberty to indulge her own thoughts and anticipations of pleasure to be derived from a removal from the prison-like monotony of Stanton. For many months, she had not been so happy as she was on this day. The quick motion of the carriage—the rapid alternation of scene—the change of air—the serene and sunny beauty of the weather, and the consciousness that every mile of her progress placed the detested residence in Leicestershire farther away from her, exhilarated her spirits, and made her forget the sullenness of her companion.

Though the journey had been commenced very early in the morning, the travellers did not reach the borders of Middlesex till between nine and ten at night, and it would be midnight before they could expect to arrive in the metropolis.

As they proceeded along the Edgeware Road, into which they had diverged in order to enter town at the West End, and when within about seven miles of London, the carriage was followed by a man on horseback, who was, indeed, no other than the notorious Page. Lord Ferrers did not much like the appearance of the fellow, and ordered the coachman to increase his speed. This, however, had not the effect of ridding them of their suspicious companion, who, being well mounted, cantered with the greatest ease and *sang-froid* imaginable, sometimes behind the carriage and sometimes at the side, so as to be plainly seen from the windows, into which he cast many inquisitive glances. At such an hour, in the deepening shades of night, and on a road then

little traversed, the appearance of a man who seemed determined to keep up with them, not a little alarmed Lady Ferrers, and, indeed, excited something like trepidation in the breast of the Earl himself. Though there were three men to one, the apprehension of the party would have been greatly relieved by the absence of the intruder ; for the coachman could not quit his reins, the groom was not armed, and effectual resistance, in the event of an attack, could only be looked for from Ferrers, who always had pistols concealed about him.

Had the Earl's courage on such an occasion as this, been equal to his violence with those who were in his power, and over whom he domineered with threats and cruelty, Page, the highwayman, might, with the assistance of the groom, probably have been got rid of before he could have made any hostile manifestation. But, no doubt for wise purposes, it always happens that the man who is a tyrant when in safety or feebly opposed, is always the most sneaking and abject in real danger.

Though the Earl had never seen Page before, the latter knew *him* well enough, not only by the armorial bearings on the carriage, (for your thorough-bred highwayman finds a little knowledge of heraldry very convenient), but by Gabel's accurate description of his Lordship's personal appearance. To this, Jem had added certain particulars of his habits and character, of which at the present juncture, Page determined to take advantage. Accordingly, when the carriage arrived at a lonely part of the road, near a lane branching off towards Neesden, the highwayman suddenly called to the coachman to stop. He then went to the carriage-window which was up, and ordering the travellers to let it down, presented a pistol, saying,

“ Deliver your money immediately! No parleying, or I'll blow your brains out!”

Ferrers now drew a pistol from his pocket, and presented it at the robber; but his hand trembled so violently that a good aim was impracticable.

Seeing this, Page laughed outright. “ You

don't know how to handle that tool, my Lord," he said. "Give it to me."

"You seem to be acquainted with me, fellow," said the Earl. "How is that?"

"Never mind," replied Page. "I know many better men than you among the Lords. But we waste time. Give me your pistol."

To the astonishment even of his wife, Ferrers complied with the highwayman's demand, and resigned his weapon. Upon which, Page still tittering, observed, "My Lord, you always carry more than one pistol about you. Come, let's have the other."

This mandate was also obeyed ; the second weapon was delivered ; and the robber proceeded in his work. Having eased the Earl of his money, he went to Lady Ferrers, and, apologizing for his rudeness, told her it was absolutely necessary that he should have *her* purse. On receiving it from the Countess, Page said,

"I observed you, my Lady, a few minutes ago, putting something behind you on the seat.

I don't wish to be rough. I like to deal handsomely with every body. I'm a straight-forward man; but it's only fair to say that I mean to search the carriage, and if I find anything concealed, by G— I'll blow your brains out! Nothing can be farther from my wish than to deal harshly by you, or any one; only, in this matter, I must be positive. Excuse me, my Lady. It's my way. I always take care of myself."

Thus adjured, Lady Ferrers gave up her watch.

"Now, my Lord," continued Page, "I want *your* ticker."

"What?" said Ferrers.

"Your watch," replied the highwayman, with a derisive grin. "I thought you understood 'flash' better than to ask so foolish a question."

The Earl hesitated, and was about to remonstrate, when Page cut short all intermission by thrusting his pistol into closer contact with Ferrers's head.

"Here!" stammered the Earl, in a violent tremor, delivering a handsome and valuable gold repeater.

"One thing more," observed Page, "and then I'll wish your Lordship good night, and a pleasant journey to town."

"What more can you want?" asked Ferrers.

"Why that you pledge me your honour, as a nobleman, that you've got no other valuables about you," responded the highwayman.

"Upon my honour," eagerly rejoined Ferrers, "I having nothing more at present in my possession."

"I must search you, though," pursued Page, opening the door of the carriage, thrusting himself into it, and beginning to rifle the Earl's pockets.

"How's this?" asked Ferrers. "You promised to be off, and let me pursue my journey."

"That was a flam and a trap," replied his assailant. "'Twas only to see what sort of

answer you'd make ; and your manner convinced me you was telling a lie. So, let's see what you've got in your pockets. Ah! a reader! I thought I should find something," continued the highwayman, drawing a pocket-book from the Earl's coat. " This 'll do." He then left the carriage.

" Drive on, coachman!" exclaimed Page.
" Good night, my Lord!"

So saying, he struck off into the by-road leading to Neesden.

Ferrers now broke out into all manner of fulminations against the highwayman, and declared that had it not been for the Countess's screams and the fuss she made, he would never have submitted to be robbed.

" A pretty affair, this," said he. " Here have I been plundered of a hundred pounds and more in bank notes, besides my watch and my purse, and all because I had a squalling woman with me. I'll never travel with you again, Madam."

Lady Ferrers, who had in fact been infinitely

the more self-possessed of the two, made no reply to the preposterous observation of her husband, otherwise than by casting at him a look of unmitigated scorn.

In a very short time after they had been plundered, the travellers reached London, when Ferrers, having deposited the Countess at an hotel in Piccadilly, proceeded to Bow Street and gave information of the robbery. From his description of the highwayman, Pope, one of the most active police officers of his day, was certain that the man who stopped his Lordship could be no other than Page. The constable knew some of Page's haunts, and, having received a warrant, took immediate steps to apprehend the offender.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHEWING WHAT ENSUED UPON THE ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE HUGH
BERNARD.

Edw. Wherefore art thou come?

Light. To rid thee of thy life!

MARLOWE.

He that dares most to do thee service,
Will sooner snatch meat from a hungry lion,
Than come to rescue thee.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE Wednesday had now arrived when Gabel's plot against Hugh Bernard was to be executed. It was the day succeeding that on which Page had robbed Lord and Lady Ferrers. Jem and his confederates met at the Sportsman's Retreat about five o'clock in the evening, to concert finally the measures to be adopted in the accomplishment of their atrocious project.

Mr. Ram provided them with a comfortable dinner on the occasion. A hot joint of pork, flanked by cabbages and potatoes, formed the substantial part of the meal, and this was washed down by copious libations of porter and drams of gin. The friends would not indulge themselves with punch at present, but reserved the enjoyment of a flowing bowl till the job should be done, when they purposed to meet again over a late and jolly supper.

Page, who had every reason to be satisfied with the booty he got on the preceding night from the Earl, said not a word respecting his exploit on the road, because he suspected that his trusty friends, Captain Lewis and Jem, were just then rather low in their finances, and he had an instinctive dislike to granting the loans which he knew would, under such circumstances, be required at his hands. He made no scruple, however, of eating a hearty dinner at Gabel's expense, though he believed the other could scarcely afford it. "But what's that to me?" thought Page. "I shall earn

fifty such by what I'm going to do to-night for him."

About seven o'clock, the house-breaker, carrying with him a bundle containing sundry garments with which he was to disguise himself, started for the place of rendez-vous, full of exulting anticipations of effectually silencing his intended victim. Molly, who had been left in charge of the premises, received her comely sweetheart, and helped to array him in the dress which was to conceal his identity from Bernard.

It has already been seen that Gabel was an adept in various kinds of personation, though the peculiarity of his visage might seem to forbid his assuming any other character than his own. Perseverance and practice will, however, overcome almost any disqualification. One-handed men have been known to play admirably on the flute: people without arms have succeeded in writing a good *hand* with their feet; and persons of the feeblest frame have, by constant discipline, attained a power

of endurance greatly surpassing that of the most robust. Thus, it might perhaps be owing to Gabel's unparalleled ugliness, which would distinguish him among a thousand, that, when it was necessary to disguise himself, he was forced on contrivances more subtle than might have occurred to another person. Facility begets carelessness, and carelessness leads to failure. Disguise was difficult to Jem, and therefore Jem excelled in it.

In an hour after Gabel had left the Sportsman's Retreat, Page and Captain Lewis sallied forth in a return chaise, which happened to stop at Mr. Ram's house after having carried a gentleman to a villa in the neighbourhood of Black Lion Lane. This was a fortunate circumstance for Page, who, otherwise, would have been reluctant, in consequence of his encounter with Lord Ferrers, to trust himself openly abroad, as he had no doubt the officers would be on the alert after him.

On the arrival of the highwaymen at the house near Paddington Church, the plan of

action was recapitulated. It was settled that there was to be no firing of pistols which might alarm the passers by: no blood was to be shed if it could possibly be avoided: the victim was to be suddenly seized and smothered: everything was to be done in quiet; and at midnight the body was to be sunk in the pond. A cutlass or two might, however, be handy, in case the young man's resistance should be more powerful than was expected. After settling these preliminaries, the accomplices took their several posts.

Meanwhile, Hugh himself had not been unmindful that a few precautions would be adviseable on *his* part. He was not, at times, without sundry misgivings as to the affair. Still he resolved, as we have already said, to obey the uncouth summons of Mr. Winterbottom, rather than miss the least chance of hearing intelligence on so interesting and mysterious a topic as his parentage. Remembering the animosity of Lord Ferrers, and the rage of Gabel on account of his defeat at Bath, the

young man thought it just possible that one or both those persons might have planned the letter to decoy him. He, therefore, provided himself with a brace of loaded pistols in case of foul play, and resolved to keep a wary eye on whatever should occur.

The day had been gloomy for the time of year. It was unusually cold ; and, at intervals, a moaning wind drove before it repeated showers of rain, intermingled with hail. As night set in, the heavy vapours which hung low in the firmament, deepened the nocturnal twilight of June almost into positive darkness ; and although the north-west gusts kept the clouds in perpetual motion, the air was not relieved of its load, but, as one black and ragged mass scudded across the welkin, its place was immediately supplied by another. So unseasonable indeed was the night, that no suburban strollers were about, and the vicinity of Paddington Green seemed more solitary than usual.

The time of meeting had now arrived. Soon

after the church clock had struck ten, a knock was heard at the door of the house we have described, and when Molly answered it, Hugh inquired if Mr. Winterbottom lived there.

“Yes sure,” said the girl. “Please to walk in, Sir.”

The voice in which these words were uttered, struck upon Hugh’s ear. He thought he had heard it before, more especially as the accent was decidedly a Somersetshire one. He looked hard at the girl; but the flame of the candle she held flared about so in the night-wind, that he could not get a good view of her face, and even had he seen it steadily, it is probable he would not have recognised her, so much had her late manner of life altered the expression of her countenance. Still the voice and accent were familiar to him, and he was about to question her, when Molly, perceiving his intention, prevented it by ascending the stairs, and bidding him follow her to her master’s room.

Bernard, therefore, was quickly ushered into an apartment on the first floor, where by the

side of a tent-bed, sat the old gentleman he came to see.

“Walk in, Sir,” said Mr. Winterbottom, “and take a chair. I ask pardon for bringing you into my bed-room ; but, alack ! I am a sad invalid, and to go up and down stairs with this gout is too much for me—it is, indeed, Sir. I can’t hardly move from my chair. So, you received my letter ? A bad night this, but still I thought you would come. Pray sit down.”

Hugh did as he was bidden, and Mr. Winterbottom being seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing, the former looked anxiously around him. His companion seemed to be about seventy years of age. He was seated in an easy chair, and his legs, which were wrapped in flannel, were supported on a stool covered with pillows. A dressing-gown enveloped his figure, and a night-cap was drawn down close to his eye-brows. But what most excited Hugh’s attention, was the manner in which the lower part of the old man’s face was con-

cealed by a handkerchief so placed as to cover his mouth.

This, however, might be accounted for by the asthma with which his companion was so grievously troubled. Mr. Winterbottom appeared to Hugh to be in reality a feeble old valetudinarian ; so afflicted, indeed, as by his own account, not to be able to leave his bedroom. Everything seemed to be so fair and so peaceful, that the young man blamed himself for cherishing any suspicion to the contrary.

Having recovered from his cough, and panted awhile to regain his breath, Mr. Winterbottom said, in an almost exhausted voice, “Lord how sore my lungs is, to be sure ! Well, my good Sir, you would no doubt like to hear something about your father and mother.”

“ Certainly,” replied Hugh ; “ that was precisely the object that brought me hither, according to the statement in your note.”

“ Ondoubtedly,” rejoined the old man.

"Your father and mother was friends of mine, in regard as I know'd 'em perfectly well, and which I have often——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Hugh with something of impatience; "your letter has already made me aware of that. What I seek now to know is the name and station of my parents. Who were they?"

"Who were they!" echoed the old man.
"Why, don't you know that?"

"No," replied Hugh. "I have come to your house in the expectation of learning the secret. Enlighten me, I beseech you!"

"Your father," said Mr. Winterbottom, "was——"

Here he paused; and while Hugh listened intently to catch what was to follow, he thought he heard, during that brief interval of silence, the key stealthily turned in the door on the outside. He could not, however, be certain of this, because the sound was so slight, and because it was immediately overcome by another fit of the old gentleman's cough, which seemed

at that moment to be worse than ever. Hugh might have been mistaken as to the sound of the key ; though the suspicion, even of such a thing, made him not a little nervous. On the other hand, no one was in the room but himself and an aged and feeble invalid. Danger, therefore, was out of the question in the present state of affairs. Still, the house was a lonely one ; the hour was late ; his companion's manner was evasive ; and, unless his ears deceived him, the door of the room had been locked upon him.

Hastily resolving on a course of action, he exclaimed,

“ To be plain with you, Mr. Winterbottom, I have neither time nor inclination to stay longer here, unless you give me at once the information, under a promise of which you have brought me, at this inconvenient hour, from the city.”

The old man's eyes twinkled with a malignant expression ; and, as his fingers were busy in undoing the band of his morning gown, he said,

“ Don't be in so great a hurry, young man. It

is so long ago since I see your father and mother, that I must take a little time to recollect all about it."

Hugh's perplexity became stronger and stronger. "Can it," thought he, "be possible that I am entrapped? Is the person before me acting a part in disguise?"

Under this apprehension, he looked still more anxiously about. Opposite where he sat, was a door, opening as he thought into another room, and at his side was the bed, of which the curtains were drawn almost from head to foot. As he gazed at this, a slight movement of the small portion of counterpane visible, caught his eye, and increased his suspicion.

"Somebody is in that bed," said he.

"Ah, yes," replied Mr. Winterbottom. "A poor sick brother of mine, who lives with me. He would quite take it to heart if I didn't sit in his room and help to nurse him."

This last observation confirmed Bernard's fear. How could an invalid, who declared himself to be unable to move, nurse another?

Fixing a keen and scrutinizing look on his companion's face, the young man discerned the scar under his left ear, which, like the terrible mark on the brow of Cain, seemed carved there that all men might know and shun him.

Losing all prudence in the momentary indignation that swelled his bosom on finding himself thus trepanned, he exclaimed,

"Villain! I know you. You are the ruffian Gabel!"

As he uttered these words, Bernard drew one of his pistols from his pocket.

In an instant, the whole room was in a tumult. Gabel threw off his gown, and started to his feet. But Hugh, levelling his pistol at him, kept him at bay. This, however, afforded the young man only a momentary protection; for Page, who had been concealed in the bed, leaped out, with a cutlass in his hand, and assailed him at the side. With the rapidity of thought, Hugh turned and fired at his new assailant.

"Damnation!" roared the highwayman, as his sword-arm dropped helplessly to his side.

"He has hit me!" And staggering backwards to the bed, Page once more sank on it.

The door which Hugh had noticed, was now pushed open. Lewis rushed into the room, and before Hugh could clasp his other pistol, the two robbers seized him, threw him on the floor, and while Lewis knelt on his chest, Gabel pressed the pillows on his face with the intention of smothering him.

This, however, the ruffians found to be very difficult of accomplishment. Hugh was in the vigour of youth; desperation gave him additional strength; he was struggling for life, and it was with the utmost difficulty that Lewis and Gabel could keep him on the floor. Whenever, in a moment of convulsive agony, he was able to push the pillows from his face his shrieks of "Murder! Help!" must have sounded far beyond the room wherein he lay in the very jaws of death.

While this savage act was being perpetrated, Gregory Skrymster and the Squire were pacing the church-yard engaged in earnest discourse. On that night, Foxston was in a more than

usually excited state. Late as it was, Skrymster could not induce him to leave the place of burial, or indeed, scarcely to stir from his sister's grave. Perhaps in the gloominess of the weather, the unhappy Squire might have found something congenial with his own mind : perhaps he anticipated a more than usual state of grief and watchfulness when he should be alone in his chamber ; he might, therefore, wish to prolong the time of retiring to bed as much as possible. Be this as it may, it is certain that he and Skrymster were lingering among the solemn tombs to a late hour.

On a sudden, the report of a pistol broke upon the silence of the burial-ground. Foxston and his companion were startled, and before they could recover from their surprise, the dismal shouts for help were distinctly heard. As one side of the farm-house abutted on the church-yard, the friends could be in no doubt whence the sounds proceeded. The first idea that crossed the Squire's mind, was that some house-breakers were committing a burglary,

and murdering the inhabitants ; though as it was not eleven o'clock, he wondered that such an act should be committed so early. If, however, relief was to be afforded, not a moment could be lost. Darting towards the spot, he called on Skrymster to follow him.

In a few moments, the friends had climbed the north-west wall of the church-yard, and dropped into the paddock before the farmhouse. Advancing to the windows, they tried to force open the shutters, and gain admittance by the parlour. But their efforts were vain : the fastenings would not give way. They listened : all was still.

“ We must seek elsewhere,” said Gregory. “ Perhaps the shrieks came from the road, down by the Alms-Houses. *This* house seems quiet enough.”

While he spoke, Foxston applied his ear to the key-hole of the door.

“ It *is* here ! it *is* here !” whispered he, turning to his companion. “ Hark ! I catch a low sound of moaning. Follow me to the

back. We may find admittance there. Quick ! I'll force an entrance, if all the demons of hell stood in my way."

The rear of the premises was soon gained ; and, by the united force of Foxston and his companion, the kitchen-window was dashed in. The room itself was empty ; for Molly, hearing the noise of attack from without, had secreted herself. The next rush of the assailants was to the parlour. Here also, all was quiet ; but as they listened for any sound to guide them, a tread of feet in the floor above was heard, followed by the opening of a door.

Brandishing the cudgel he always carried, Skrymster ran up the stairs, quick as lightning, and was opposed on the landing-place by Lewis armed with a cutlass.

" Back ! back !" cried he to Gregory, with a horrible oath. " You rush upon a bloody death !"

This menace did not hinder the trooper's advance. Lewis cut at him right and left ; but the ruffian little knew his opponent's skill in

such encounters. With the dexterity of a practised swordsman, Gregory parried Lewis's thrusts and cuts, and dealing a heavy blow on his hand so bruised it, that the highwayman's sword dropped on the floor. Before he could regain the weapon, Skrymster and Foxston, the latter of whom was unarmed, rushed into the chamber.

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